

ISSUE 22

Compliments of Stacey Shanner

# BUSINESS IN ACTION

## DID YOU KNOW:

The magazine is typically displayed in the home for 3–4 weeks per issue. Half of recipients rank it as the most valuable branded product they receive from businesses.

## MARKETING'S SECRET WEAPON

How to capitalize on  
QR codes for engagement



Stacey Shanner  
REALTOR®

## WHAT'S YOUR HOME REALLY WORTH?



SCAN TO SEE  
YOUR ESTIMATED  
HOME VALUE!



# Front of Tear Out Card 1



## Summer Networking Know-How

Abundant networking opportunities in summer could help you build meaningful relationships. Save this card filled with tips for maximizing these events.





**Stacey Shanner**  
Realtor®

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**SHANNER  
REALTY**

57 percent of readers save these tear out cards to reference recipes and other helpful tips and pass along your contact info to referrals.

# Back of Tear Out Card 1

### 1

#### CONFERENCES, ETC.

Summer's relaxed atmosphere lays the ideal backdrop for capitalizing on these occasions. Meet other business owners, hear from industry leaders, and interact with vendors and potential clients, swapping innovative ideas and sparking vital initial connections.

### 2

#### VOLUNTEERING

Community cleanups, food drives, and other such opportunities are perfect for building relationships—and they naturally inspire conversations about shared values and goals. In turn, you can foster camaraderie and even craft a positive brand identity.

### 3

#### CASUAL GATHERINGS

Fairs, open-air markets, and athletic activities like 5K races abound through the warmer months. Environments that encourage fun or community involvement make it easier to connect with people on a human level, so mingle with attendees and openly discuss your company in a style that's more personal and less rehearsed.

*To make the most of networking events, dress professionally, introduce yourself and your organization, and converse using the FORD method: ask people about their family, occupation, recreation, and dreams. Remember to collect contact information and follow up!*





Dear Bill and Judy,

It's been frequently said that the best way to help yourself is to improve others' lives, and this truism can be applied to commerce as well. This issue of Business in Action offers suggestions for how to foster connections in different ways, including tips for collaborating with other companies, an interview with a philanthropy-focused business owner, and an overview of how gratitude can improve sales.

Entrepreneurs often quickly realize that they can't be successful on their own, and one way to foster growth is through outside alliances. Enclosed, you'll find enticing reasons to consider partnerships and sound strategies to help make them a reality.

Real estate agent Stacy Allwein has embedded altruism into her career, highlighting her core values for all to see. Inside, she discusses how this has been a boon for her client relationships, standing in her community, and bottom line.

Expressing appreciation consistently is a simple yet powerful tool in any leader's arsenal. Discover ways to embrace a thankful mindset and how doing so can positively impact your team's and your customers' outlook and dedication.

In what ways can your business strategically help others? As always, it's a pleasure to send you this magazine.

**Stacey Shanner**



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Add a personal letter to the front inside cover that speaks to your connections. This personalization leads 77 percent of recipients to better appreciate the sender.



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# QR Codes: Marketing's Secret Weapon

These scannable graphics can do more than just link to websites—they can transform how you interact with customers and measure the success of your campaigns. BY FAITH FIORILE

AS A BUSINESS OWNER

looking for cost-effective ways to boost engagement and streamline your marketing, QR codes might just be your new best friend. Here are only a few of the upsides they offer.

➤ Grow your list

In order to grow your database, you need to capture customer information, and QR codes offer a perfect solution. For example, you could put one on posters or handouts at events for visitors to scan and quickly sign up for your newsletter. Or add one to your postcards, promising a discount or item of value (like an informational e-book) in exchange for their email. The more enticing the incentive, the more likely they'll be to engage.



➤ Encourage reviews

Though the exact statistics vary, numerous studies show that people are generally willing to leave reviews—you just have to make it easy for them. And with a QR code placed on a receipt or flyer, you can send customers directly to a feedback form on your preferred platform, such as your website, a social media page, or Google.

➤ Assess what works

If you're looking to see which marketing efforts are driving results, QR codes can give you the data you need. By tracking

how many people scan each one, when they do it, and where they are, you can get real-time insights into each campaign's performance, helping you make useful adjustments.

➤ Getting started

Creating QR codes is simple with a platform like Bitly, which offers a limited free account as well as tiered paid ones to suit your needs. Other options, including Canva, even allow you to customize the design. Try any of these out, and see how it can take your marketing to the next level. ■



Start a free trial with a QR code platform, and create one or two that link to your website or a special promotion.





# Unlocking Growth through Collaboration

Forming a strategic business partnership with another company can help drive sales and attract new customers. BY LAUREN KIM

**I**N A DYNAMIC MARKET CHARACTERIZED by fierce competition, it may appear counterintuitive to share your expertise or pool resources with another business. But collaboration can be an effective way to grow your enterprise while also expanding your reach—enticing benefits whether you're just starting out or looking to scale. Explore three strategies for working with other brands that may just help you achieve each of your goals.

## Information sharing

One simple approach to start with is exchanging knowledge and strategies with other business owners, such as at trade conferences or local business-association meetings. The former is especially useful



One simple approach to start with is exchanging knowledge and strategies with other business owners, such as at trade conferences or local business-association meetings.

for this since it offers so many natural opportunities to connect with noncompeting organizations in your industry. You could glean insights from experts in formal seminars, then seek clarification or further specifics during the Q & A portion; you might even have the chance to chat with them more casually after the session. There's also typically ample downtime for browsing vendor booths and mingling among the crowd, and don't overlook the value of planned gatherings like dinners. Such informal settings make it easy to engage in conversation with fellow leaders about how to

expand your offerings, leverage social media to reach your target audience, and other key topics.

Business-association meetings, meanwhile, allow for more continuous information sharing with those in your area, allowing you to pose questions regarding a particular challenge, get tactics from others with relevant experience, and follow up in the next meeting about your progress. They may be more than happy to help since they're receiving the same benefit from you. Engage fully in these exchanges, and you can gain fresh ideas, refine your



strategies, and discover innovative ways to enhance your operations—and you may even form foundational relationships you can expand into partnerships in the future.

## Comarketing

To take your collaborative efforts further, look to build a joint marketing campaign with a compatible business, such as one you met through the previous strategy, to broaden your audience. An easy way to do this is through shared social media promotions. Assess who in your geographical area would complement your services well, and work with them to create compelling posts that feature both of your services or products, tagging each other to increase your visibility. A local coffee shop and an independent bookstore, for example, are a perfect pairing—after all, a picture of the newest book release next to the featured latte of the month is bound to perk up any book lover’s or coffee nut’s interest.

**To take your collaborative efforts further, look to build a joint marketing campaign with a compatible business, such as one you met through the previous strategy, to broaden your audience.**

You could also consider cohosting a promotional event with one or more brands that align with yours, whether in terms of their values or customer demographics. Say that you’re a financial adviser seeking to help existing and potential clients navigate later-in-life decisions. You could partner with a variety of professionals, including a Seniors Real Estate Specialist® (SRES®), a tax professional, and an estate-planning attorney, to offer a one-stop-shopping experience where customers can explore complementary products and services, generating exposure and business for all involved. For a good turnout, cross-promote the event beforehand through email newsletters, coordinated social media campaigns, or cobranded flyers, building excitement and maintaining customer engagement.

## Joint offerings

To reap even more rewards, consider joining forces with a like-minded partner



to create cobranded products or services that can provide added value to both companies and their customers, driving mutual growth and success. Tactical alliances like these are common in the business world since they allow organizations to leverage each other’s strengths, expand their offerings, and reach new clients. Apple and Nike, for one, have had a long-standing agreement, developing joint products that cater to fitness enthusiasts, including Nike-branded wristbands and clock faces for Apple watches. Similarly, Uber and Spotify have discovered an innovative method to merge their brands: Uber riders can stream music from their Spotify Premium accounts

directly through the ride-sharing app, enhancing the overall experience and broadening the reach of both brands.

Similar to cobranding, the first step is connecting with a business that has like goals and a like target audience (perhaps even the one you’re already comarketing with). Then brainstorm a product or service you could provide together that would seem enticing to each of your client bases. For instance, a general cleaning company could team up with an HVAC professional to create a cobranded package that combines their offerings at a discounted rate—think a premium white-glove experience that

includes whole-home and air-duct cleaning, providing homeowners with a dust-free environment.

Launching or scaling a business can have its share of unique challenges. But by joining forces with the right company, you may be able to amplify your impact, driving success for you and your partner alike. ■

**Take  
Action**

**Evaluate your company’s current needs, and brainstorm a business collaboration that would suit you well.**



# HOW TO EMBRACE THE **NETFLIX** MINDSET

See how you can borrow from the streaming company's four culture pillars to build a stronger team and enhance your organization's morale.

BY **MATTHEW BRADY**



As you likely know, Netflix rules the streaming world, if not the entertainment one. It boasts over 300 million worldwide subscribers and is worth more than \$420 billion, numbers that virtually any business would die for. There are many reasons for its epic success, but a particularly notable one is its culture, which cofounder Reed Hastings first described to the world (via PowerPoint, no less) in a massive 2009 missive entitled “Netflix Culture: Freedom & Responsibility.”

In the fifth version, released last year, Netflix fine-tuned its now-iconic “culture memo” into four easily digestible core principles that form the foundation of its “values and performance over rules and controls” mantra: the dream team, people over process, uncomfortably exciting, and great and always better. Dive deep into each to get essential insights about hiring the right people, letting the wrong ones go, and creating a winning culture from one of the twenty-first century’s biggest success stories.

#### → The dream team

People of a certain age will recall the 1992 US men’s Olympic basketball team, also known as the Dream Team—arguably the greatest collection of sports talent ever. Netflix notes that it strives to create a similarly exceptional all-star squad within its walls, so it must be intentional in choosing its employees. (Perhaps not surprisingly, Hastings also used baseball analogies to make some of his original points.) As its culture memo states, the company’s focus is on “performance and picking the right person for every position,

even when that means swapping out someone [we] love for a better player.” The memo also lists several qualities Netflix looks for in each candidate, from candor to curiosity to resilience, to find those who “are great at what they do, and even better at working together.”

To that end, the company continues to apply its renowned “keeper test,” which involves asking the same question about every team member in two different ways: If they wanted to leave, would it fight to keep them, and, with the power of hindsight, would it hire that person again? Every employee knows and accepts this standard, resulting in a surprisingly candid environment even when management has to part ways with someone. It’s all about performance, trusting one another, and going for the gold together—qualities that very well could enhance your business as well.

#### → People over process

Historically, corporate America has valued a heavily structured, top-down approach to business, one in which employees



must do what the executive team decrees. Netflix has long gone against this particular tide, however, eschewing the traditional employer-employee culture for one with few rules and greater employee trust and empowerment. In fact, it comes

right out and says that it prides itself “on how few, not how many, decisions senior leaders make.”

Such a mindset may send a shudder down some business owners’ spines, yet Netflix claims it works

**Netflix has long gone against [a top-down approach], eschewing the traditional employer-employee culture for one with few rules and greater employee trust and empowerment.**

extremely well because top-notch ideas can come from anyone, not just an upper-echelon few. “We expect informed captains to seek out different opinions and listen to people at every level,” its culture memo states. “After a decision is made, we expect everyone, including the people who argued for a different approach, to disagree then commit.”

But perhaps the best example of this “people over process” principle can be found in the company’s vacation and business-expense policies, which are summarized in a mere





seven words: “Take vacation” and “Act in Netflix’s best interests.” Do you want every team member to reach their potential so they can help your company flourish? Just consider how you can similarly encourage their perspectives and prioritize morale, fostering greater confidence to inspire greater performance.

#### → Uncomfortably exciting

As entrepreneurs know, change is part and parcel of growing a business, especially if the aim is to be groundbreaking. However, not every worker flourishes in such a reality; given the choice, many understandably choose to ply their trades at stable, safe companies that don’t swing for the fences.

Netflix, though, has never sought that type of person for its team—in contrast, the streaming giant states that its culture “works best if you value experimentation, enjoy the uncomfortable excitement of a new or challenging project and have the resilience to thrive in this environment.” That’s why two key qualities it looks for when hiring are the courage to buck the status quo and the ability to think creatively. Imagine how much this could positively impact your business.



**“We constantly seek to improve our culture, not preserve it. . . . It’s how we entertain the world and build a wildly successful business.”**

The more unflinching your team members are about finding new and unique ways to sell your products and mission to potential clients, the better your odds of finding the “aha” idea that will propel your company to amazing growth.

#### → Great and always better

Of all corporations, Netflix would have ample reason and opportunity

to sit back and rest on its accolades and staggering profits—but it doesn’t. In his introduction to the 2024 culture memo, chief talent officer Sergio Ezama went so far as to reveal that “we often say we suck today by comparison to where we want to be in the future.” So how does Netflix work to grow even more? As the company so simply yet eloquently puts it, “We constantly



seek to improve our culture, not preserve it. . . . It’s how we entertain the world and build a wildly successful business.” Continue on a constant quest to make your organization a place where people love to work and can thrive both personally and professionally, and you, too, may hold the key to building a wildly successful venture.

It’s been said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and in this case, it may just be a boon for your business. Even if you aim to merely imitate rather than duplicate Netflix’s accomplishments by incorporating the four core principles of its culture memo, you might just find greater revenue streaming in. ■

**Take  
Action**

**Reflect on Netflix’s guiding principles, and determine which of them you can integrate into your hiring practices and culture.**



For more info, visit [jobs.netflix.com/culture](https://jobs.netflix.com/culture)



# Fit for Success

Hadija Davidson, founder and CEO of the wellness training company Ms. Dee Fit, explains how she overcame early-year challenges and has since excelled in a competitive industry.

INTERVIEW WITH **HADIJA DAVIDSON** / WRITTEN BY **ANDRE RIOS**  
PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF **MS. DEE FIT, UNLESS NOTED**



HADIJA  
DAVIDSON

## **Q** What inspired you to found your company?

I come from a background of CrossFit and competitive athletic training, but about ten years ago, I struggled with my health. After losing my sister to lupus, I fell into a depression, which caused me to begin stress eating and eventually gain weight. I didn't realize at the time that it was catching up to me; my doctor explained that I was at risk of diabetes and other health concerns.

That huge scare set me straight and led me to take my health and wellness seriously. I wasn't motivated to stay healthy, though, until I found an appropriate workout plan and had a support system of fitness instructors and family. I ended up losing about forty pounds, and that personal success inspired me to become a fitness instructor.

I started working for a retail gym and formed a substantial client base—unfortunately, this was right before the pandemic shutdown in 2020. Once our gym closed for social distancing, I knew I had to pivot quickly to keep supporting my clients. As is common in the New York City metro area, many were busy professionals juggling several responsibilities, so they highly valued the reliability of a fitness routine. Sure, you can track your wellness with a smartphone app, but you also need someone to coach you through a plan.

So I created my own business to help, forming my model around being busy while still

prioritizing wellness. I designed an online platform that offers virtual fitness programs, such as for yoga and HIIT, that people could do from home and provided local outdoor classes as well. I also committed to staying connected with my clients through social media and virtual check-ins, offering motivation and accountability when they needed it most.

## **Q** How has your business grown since the pandemic?

Coming out of lockdown, I had a community of highly flexible clients because they were at home or furloughed. Making the transition after they all went back into work was a challenge because I felt like everyone got busy again. At a time, I had more in-person clients, but I knew I had to transition to virtual options. One thing that helped was communicating to my clients that fitness isn't just something that you can stop doing if you want to see results. I would say to them, "Check in frequently, and send me messages so I can consult with you regularly." This has helped me retain my client base.





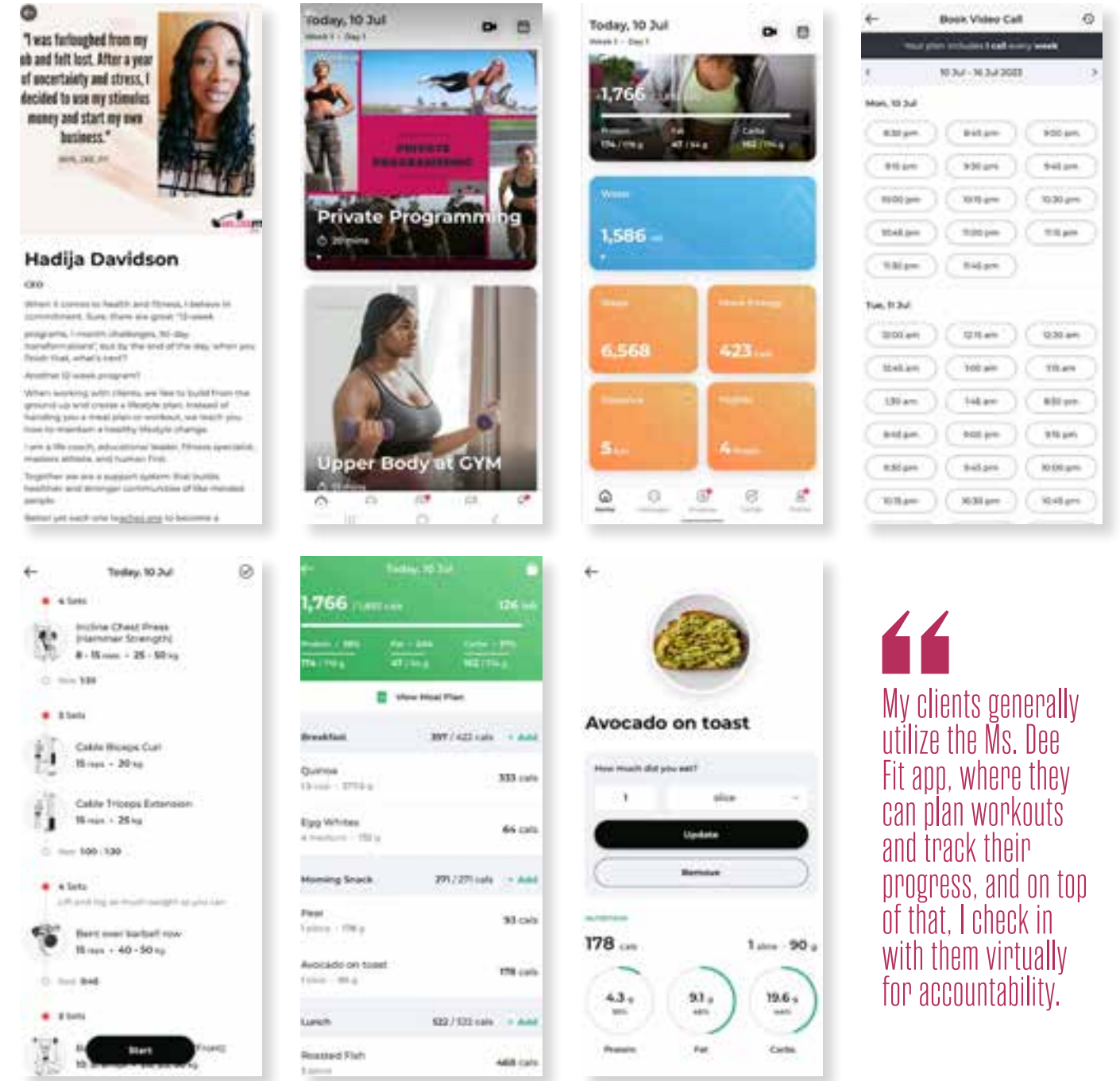
## Q What types of services do you offer?

When I started my business, I was ready to build my own brick-and-mortar gym, but I found that the majority of my clients wanted to work out on their own, at home, or at a local gym of their choosing. So they don't all necessarily come to me consistently for group fitness classes or other in-person services. I do host such sessions for those who are interested and available; that's another layer of support I offer.

For the most part, though, my business is virtual. My clients generally utilize the Ms. Dee Fit app, where they can

plan workouts and track their progress, and on top of that, I check in with them virtually for accountability. In this way, I provide the tech convenience of the app along with direct coaching to help my clients succeed.

I also offer several different membership tiers because I understand that everyone's fitness journey is unique. Some people need a structured program with one-on-one support, while others just want access to workouts they can do on their own schedule. By providing different programs, I can meet my clients where they are—whether they're



“My clients generally utilize the Ms. Dee Fit app, where they can plan workouts and track their progress, and on top of that, I check in with them virtually for accountability.”



busy professionals, parents, or beginners looking to start their fitness journey. This flexibility ensures that they get the right level of guidance and support without feeling overwhelmed or restricted by a one-size-fits-all approach.

**Q Would you discuss the products that you offer as well?**

When I first started my online platform, I reflected on what my clients needed—using real feedback from what they told me would help them get in shape. So I created a few exercise tools like resistance bands and apparel and designed workouts around these products.

In addition, I have digital assets like e-books, which is something I found that competing services were offering and that my clients requested. They wanted a way to get immediate advice or guidance even when they couldn't reach me. One of my biggest successes as a business owner has been the impact of my fitness and nutrition guides; they've been a great source of revenue. More importantly, though, they've helped so many people stay on track with their health goals. I've received countless messages from clients who say my e-books have given

them the tools they needed to stay consistent with their workouts and healthy eating, even with their packed schedules. Knowing that I'm helping people take control of their health in an accessible and affordable way is incredibly rewarding.

**Q How do you distinguish yourself from other gyms and fitness services?**

A lot of people rely on fitness technology, but I aim to make my services more customizable and approachable, especially

GETTY IMAGES

“A lot of people rely on fitness technology, but I aim to make my services more customizable and approachable, especially my app—it's not a typical one you just click into and out of.”

my app—it's not a typical one you just click into and out of. For example, I create tailored workouts for each client, and they can enter the app to check off what they've done or even share videos with me, which

I can respond to and provide tips. I also videoconference with them to walk them through their wellness plans and do check-ins every week. This accountability with direct conversations makes the app feel more supportive.

Further, I discovered from consulting with clients that many had concerns beyond physical health. They often weren't happy with the way they looked, were using the gym as their only outlet to





relieve stress, or struggled to build work-life balance. I thought, *This is about more than just fitness; it's about mental health and making a lifetime commitment to taking good care of yourself.* So I merged the two to offer mental-health support and advice on how to relieve stress alongside fitness guidance.

I also make sure to engage with my community through social media, my app, and check-in sessions, sharing not just workouts but also motivational content, wellness tips, and real-life success stories. My goal is to create a supportive environment where clients feel empowered to reach their goals. Plus, having a variety of products like fitness apparel and equipment helps me provide a complete wellness experience that sets me apart from others in the industry.

**Q Relationship building seems vital to your business. Do you have an example of its effectiveness?**

I have one customer who's been with me since the lockdown started. Her initial goal was just to get out of the house and lose five to ten pounds, but I told her that she should prioritize a healthy routine that involves sufficient exercise and good nutrition. And she's been consistently putting effort into her fitness and diet, which is because I took the time to really get to know her personality, background, routines, and schedule.

Ultimately, I'm able to earn long-standing clients because I focus on building connections and relationships, and that all starts with me making the commitment to plan out their schedules and make changes together. Being flexible helps, too, adjusting my availability to suit their needs. I'm dedicated but not too hard on them since I'm realistic with their goals and lifestyle demands.

**Q What's next for Ms. Dee Fit?**

My next focus is to try to start working with some large companies. Many corporate buildings here in New York City provide gyms for employees—a lot of businesses are encouraging fitness, diet, nutrition, and stress relief as part of the wellness packages in their health-care plans. I see this as another outlet for me to have a voice and promote my services to guide people to reach their goals.

I also want to relaunch a youth program, which I had previously conducted a temporary trial for. I feel like parents are eager to bring their children along with them to work out, giving kids a break from devices and helping them focus on fitness. Then again, some clients say that they enjoy this time away from their kids, so I'll take it on a case-by-case basis. I always try to customize my offerings to each client's unique situation. ■



For more info, visit [msdeefit.com](https://msdeefit.com)



My next focus is to try to start working with some large companies. Many corporate buildings here in New York City provide gyms for employees—a lot of businesses are encouraging fitness, diet, nutrition, and stress relief as part of the wellness packages in their health-care plans.

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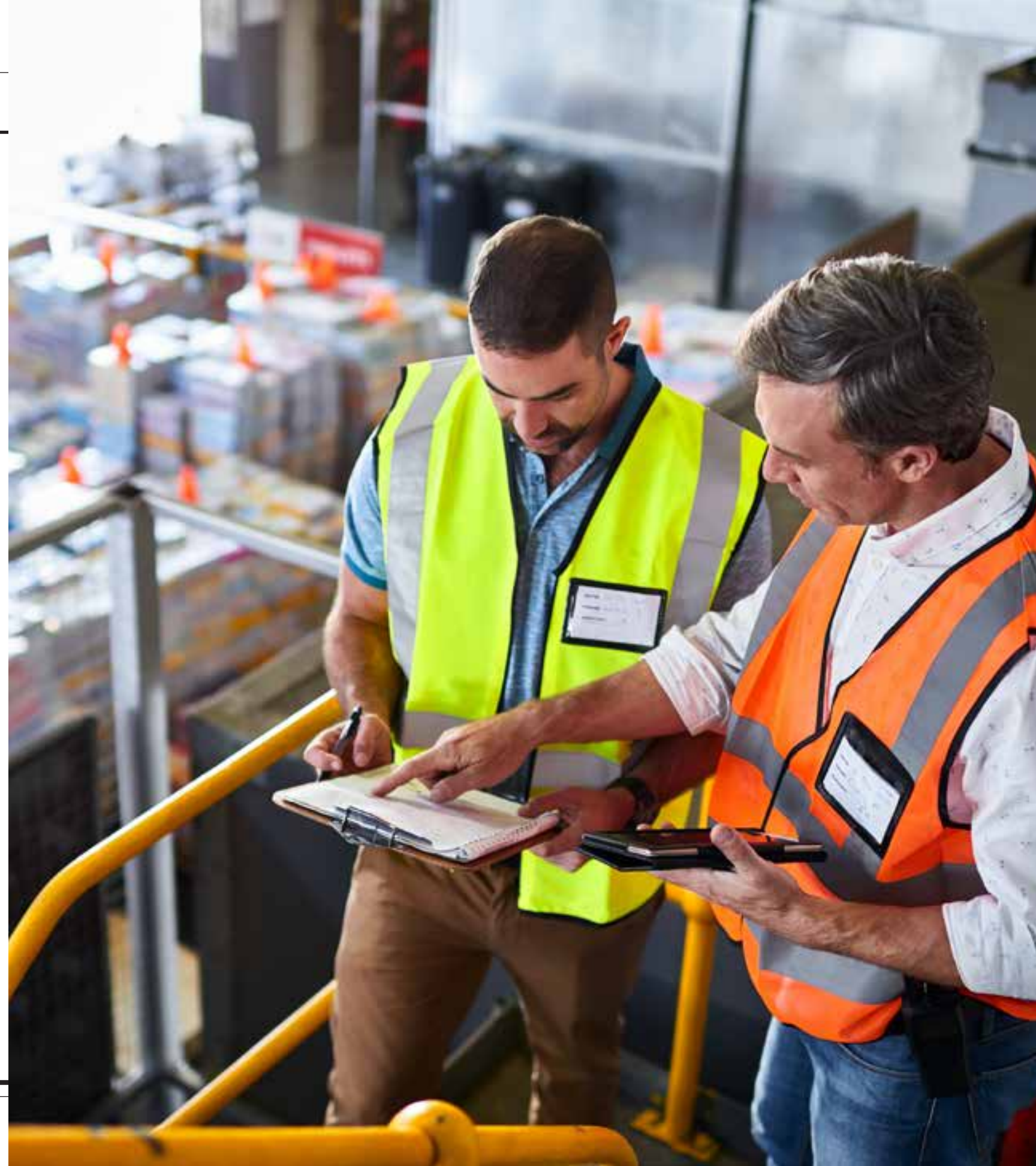
# THE SIX SIGMA SECRET

One assessment strategy rooted in the factory setting offers practically endless advantages for just about every business, and it could be your key to earning more for less. BY **ANDRE RIOS**

**I**N THE EVER-EVOLVING AND ULTRACOMPETITIVE world of business, streamlining your organization's processes while maintaining quality may be a perpetual priority—as well as a challenge. Enter Six Sigma, a profound methodology that equips businesses across industries to better satisfy these objectives. Discover the basic tenets and benefits of this concept along with practical applications for implementing it in your own company.

## » Quantifying quality

Six Sigma is a system of techniques that leverages analytical tools, statistics, and structured problem-solving to identify, inspect, and eliminate any possible inefficiencies in a workplace. The name originates from quality control in manufacturing, in which one sigma represents one deviation away from the mean. Achieving six sigma essentially means reducing long-term defects to an amazingly low rate of



3.4 times per million opportunities, resulting in minimal losses, few variables, and maximum quality that approaches perfection.

The translation of this concept to areas of business beyond manufacturing can be attributed to Motorola engineer Bill Smith, who first developed Six Sigma in 1986. His goal was to clearly analyze and then improve practices in his organization, hoping to decrease flaws and increase quality output. When General Electric attempted it, they witnessed its ability to curb spending, mitigate product waste, and ultimately improve results—and news of these changes propelled the approach into a worldwide phenomenon. After all, though it may have roots in industrial practices, the revolutionary processes have applications in all types of businesses.

(Side note: a cousin to this methodology known as Lean Six Sigma embraces a similar ideology, but it places extra emphasis on slashing wasteful or unnecessary practices).





#### » The core elements

Six Sigma's commitment to excellence is built on these foundational principles:

**1/ Customer focus:** Every project should begin with understanding customer needs, establishing expectations, and adjusting processes to help meet them.

**2/ Data-driven decision-making:** Leaders should rely on statistical analysis rather than opinions or assumptions to guide their strategies.

**3/ Variation minimization:** To reduce waste and defects, identify why errors occur and take proactive steps to avoid them, changing processes when necessary.

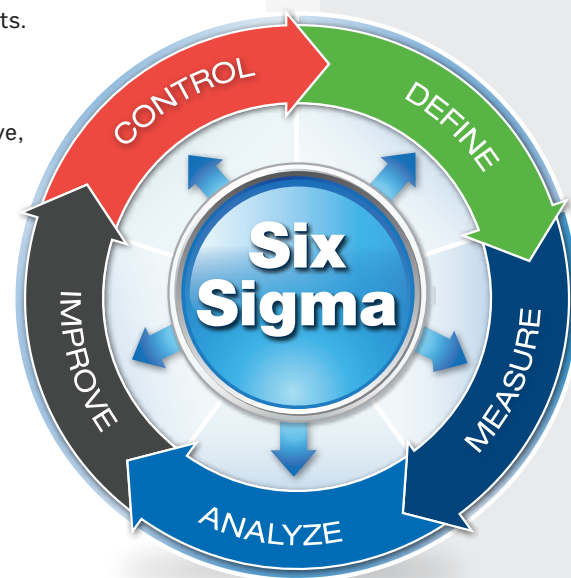
**4/ Employee involvement:** Communication and engagement throughout all levels of an organization help ensure success.

**5/ Sustainability:** Applying solutions and periodically monitoring their results will foster improvement and better prevent problems from reoccurring.

#### » A framework for fulfillment

The application of Six Sigma involves following a specific set of steps known as the DMAIC framework: define, measure, analyze, improve, and control. Each phase represents a vital component of improving a business's functions and ultimately producing more successful results.

- **Define:** Identifying a problem from the customer's perspective, noting areas for improvement, and outlining the scope of the project's investments (money, time, etc.)
- **Measure:** Collecting relevant data to establish and quantify current performance levels
- **Analyze:** Examining said data to find the root causes of inefficiencies and defects
- **Improve:** Developing and implementing solutions to address recognized issues
- **Control:** Establishing means of sustaining any improvements, such as by monitoring adjusted systems and enacting new standard operating procedures



#### » Key advantages

Practicing Six Sigma offers a wide array of benefits, the first and most direct being enhanced quality. By reducing defects and variability, it better ensures that your business consistently delivers top-tier products and services. Superior results, in turn, may increase your positive impression on consumers, boost your brand image, and attract a more loyal, engaged customer base.

Applying this framework could additionally lead to sweeping cost savings. Improved efficiency means reducing waste, lowering operational costs, and increasing profitability. When you save money, you can not only reap more results from your organization's work but also invest more in potentially lucrative initiatives like expanding your service areas and running tailored marketing campaigns.

Just as crucially, Six Sigma may positively impact your employees. Empowering your staff with problem-solving tools can go a long way toward improving performance, increasing morale, and fostering a culture of continuous advancement. Implement the concept at all levels, and you may gain a more driven team committed to your organization's success.



**Six Sigma is a system of techniques that leverages analytical tools, statistics, and structured problem-solving to identify, inspect, and eliminate any possible inefficiencies in a workplace.**



#### » Practical applications

Six Sigma's versatility makes it relevant to various industries, from manufacturing to health care to finance and beyond. If you're still on the fence about its fit with your business, consider these applications:

- **Health care:** Many hospitals and clinics use this program to enhance patient care approaches, reduce medical errors, and optimize resource utilization.

- **Finance:** Banks and other financial institutions may apply it to improve transaction accuracy, decrease processing times, and prevent costly mistakes.
- **Retail:** Such businesses could leverage Six Sigma to create accurate pricing, optimize inventory management, and analyze patrons' feedback.
- **Information technology:** Various IT organizations use it to augment software development, lessen the occurrence of glitches, and ensure data safety.

#### » Successful execution

Before you can officially practice Six Sigma, you'll need to pursue training and certification. This involves reaching specific achievement levels with martial arts-inspired names such as yellow belt, black belt, and champion, each of which indicates a different degree of mastery. Training programs are open to just about anyone, including top company leaders and floor employees performing hands-on production. If you're unsure where to begin, contact a certification company like ASQ to discuss your

**Before you can officially practice Six Sigma, you'll need to pursue training and certification. This involves reaching specific achievement levels with martial arts-inspired names such as yellow belt, black belt, and champion, each of which indicates a different degree of mastery.**

organization, its needs, your role in the company, and your current level of familiarity with this concept.

Upon achieving belt status, the next step is implementing Six Sigma across your organization. Approach the overhaul meticulously to overcome barriers and ultimately roll it out successfully, beginning with securing leadership support. Strong backing from shareholders and managers under your guidance will confirm that you have adequate resources and are able to align everyone with strategic goals. If you only receive minimal support, try a test run. Begin with a pilot project—focusing on a single product or establishing a short time frame—to demonstrate value and build others' confidence in this methodology.

Following that, you'll need to invest in training, first within your leadership

suite and then for your employees as a whole. Comprehensive guidance will equip them with the skills needed to realize Six Sigma strategies effectively. But don't expect perfection from day one; encourage collaboration and foster continuous improvement, focusing on long-term results rather than immediate changes. To measure the program's output, utilize KPIs to track progress and determine its impact.

While leading the practice of Six Sigma throughout all levels of your organization, be careful not to overemphasize productivity. In other words, make it known that this will be just one facet of boosting client service and achieving excellence. Focusing solely on production without addressing the cultural aspects of your company could unintentionally hinder your practices. (See page 42 to

learn more about the correlation between your organization's culture and its success.)

#### » A future with Six Sigma

As businesses continue to adapt to technological advancements and shifting market demands, Six Sigma remains a vital tool for driving efficiency and quality. Its enduring relevance lies in its ability to deliver measurable results and foster an environment of accomplishment. If you apply its focus to customer needs, leverage data-driven insights from it, and empower your team, you may eliminate roadblocks and unlock your company's full potential—both achieving greater success and sustaining it for years to come. ■

**Take  
Action**

**Contact a Six Sigma certification company to pursue more information about this framework and its practical applications for your organization.**





SPOTLIGHT

# MOVE — FORWARD

## BY GIVING BACK

FREDERICK, MARYLAND-BASED REAL ESTATE AGENT **STACY ALLWEIN** HAS BEEN IN THE INDUSTRY FOR OVER TWENTY YEARS BUT IS EQUALLY KNOWN LOCALLY FOR HER PHILANTHROPY. HERE SHE EXPLAINS WHY ALTRUISM IS A CORNERSTONE OF EVERYTHING SHE DOES AND HOW IT CAN ELEVATE A BUSINESS—NOT ONLY FOR ITS CLIENTS BUT ALSO FOR ITS LEADERS AND TEAM MEMBERS.

INTERVIEW WITH **STACY ALLWEIN**  
WRITTEN BY **MATTHEW BRADY**  
PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF **STACY ALLWEIN**





Q

YOU SEEM TO ENJOY GIVING BACK ALMOST AS MUCH AS ASSISTING PEOPLE WITH BUYING AND SELLING. HAVE BOTH ALWAYS BEEN IMPORTANT TO YOU?

I've always been really passionate about giving back. In fact, at previous companies I worked for, I was the "giving-back ambassador," and I often tell people that I'd volunteer full-time if I could swing it financially. But I also love real estate and am so grateful for my business. And because I've been successful in my field, I have been able to take care of both my team and my community in various ways over the years, which has been very rewarding.

“

**WHEN YOU'RE CONSTANTLY AND VISIBLY SERVING YOUR COMMUNITY, BUSINESS JUST AUTOMATICALLY FOLLOWS. IT'S ALL ABOUT NAME RECOGNITION—AND SUCH EFFORTS GET YOUR NAME OUT THERE.**



Q

IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU HELP OTHERS? HOW HAS DOING SO BENEFITED YOUR BUSINESS?

One of the things we do is support the elementary school that my kids went to and my grandkids now go to, providing however we can—from supplying water bottles for functions to sponsoring their annual 5K. We also sponsor at least one local baseball team and football team every season.

Beyond that, I am the VP of the Phoenix Recovery Academy, the only high school in Frederick dedicated to the educational needs of students recovering from substance abuse issues. It has been a game changer for me personally, and I feel like I fit in so well with my skill set and what I can do to help these kids, including chairing their gala and auction every year and fundraising to help keep the academy going.

When you're constantly and visibly serving your community, business just automatically follows. It's all about name recognition—and such efforts get your name out there. I couldn't say for certain how many transactions or referrals we've gotten directly from sponsoring sports teams, but I can tell you that wherever we go in the community, people will say "You're Stacy Allwein" or "You work for the Allwein team." They all know us, and it's for positive things.

Here's one way it shows: We were making "blessing bags" back in winter for people in need and put the cause out on social media, and the community responded and helped so much. Every time I went to my office, there were boxes of items to put in the bags. I think we just have that reputation for being people who can be called on and relied on to assist others.







Q

## DO YOU CONSIDER YOUR PHILANTHROPY AN INTENTIONAL OR NATURAL PART OF YOUR MARKETING?

It's both. My listing presentation talks about how I'm very active in giving back to whoever needs it in the community. But I do own a business where our clients are always the top priority, and there are only twenty-four hours in a day. So I've learned that we need to be focused and set aside a certain budget that we can use to support others as a team in addition to personally giving back.

Then there's the word-of-mouth marketing that just happens naturally. For instance, within the last three or four years, I've had several transactions as a direct result of my work with the Phoenix—I didn't even need to give my sales spiel! [Laughs] That's because the academy gives me kudos when I'm introduced at functions, making my association with and work done for it second nature to people. And it costs me nothing.

“

**WITHIN THE LAST THREE OR FOUR YEARS, I'VE HAD SEVERAL TRANSACTIONS AS A DIRECT RESULT OF MY WORK WITH THE PHOENIX—I DIDN'T EVEN NEED TO GIVE MY SALES SPIEL! [LAUGHS]**







Q

## DOES YOUR FAMILY SHARE YOUR VALUES? IF SO, HOW HAVE THEY BEEN IMPACTED BY IT?

Definitely. I'll give an example that's close to my heart. Last year, the Phoenix had a golf tournament, which is a typical event for nonprofits. I have three granddaughters, then nine and ten years old, who have been taught about coat drives and diaper drives and how important an organization like Toys for Tots is. So I decided to bring them to the tournament, even though I was a bit hesitant since they were pretty young for it. And they were amazing! The younger one even helped encourage people to take several turns each at the putting contest to see if they could get a hole in one. They learned a priceless lesson: giving back is important, and it's what we do as a family. That gave me so much joy.

Q

## HOW DO YOU INTEND TO FURTHER YOUR PHILANTHROPY?

Truthfully, my reaction to virtually everything I see on social media is "I need to help those people or that person." Folks always say that I do so much, but I feel like I could do so much *more*. So it's on my agenda down the road to set up what's called a "forever transaction," through which my agency will automatically donate a certain number of dollars to a charity with each transaction. My kids and I founded the Be Like Bob nonprofit after my husband passed away; maybe we'll give to that or the Phoenix Foundation or leave it up to our clients to decide. Just as important as donating the money will be making sure there's visibility around the cause to create the biggest impact.

“

**IT'S ON MY AGENDA DOWN THE ROAD TO SET UP WHAT'S CALLED A 'FOREVER TRANSACTION,' THROUGH WHICH MY AGENCY WILL AUTOMATICALLY DONATE A CERTAIN NUMBER OF DOLLARS TO A CHARITY WITH EACH TRANSACTION.**

Q

## WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER ENTREPRENEURS ABOUT GIVING BACK?

Just do it. It can only help your business, which can, in turn, allow you to help even more people. It's vital that you find and embrace what your values are and make sure that you're crystal clear about them to others. If you remain focused on that, it will be easier to stay grounded and make a true difference.



For more info, visit [allweinteam.com](http://allweinteam.com)

Stacy is well-known throughout the Frederick County area for her community involvement and volunteerism. She is on the board of the Phoenix Recovery Academy and volunteers with the Alzheimer's Association, Toys for Tots, and many other charities. Stacy received the Frederick County Association of Realtors® 2018 Community Service Award and was recognized as a Frederick County "Do Gooder" for all that she does to give back.



# Boost Sales with the Power of Gratitude

Feeling and expressing gratitude is a highly impactful tactic you can use to help improve your team's morale and performance and enhance your customer experience and loyalty.

BY **LAUREN KIM**





An effective sales strategy often hinges on continually striving for the next milestone, whether it's securing a new client or closing a big deal. However, there's immense value in pausing every once in a while to genuinely appreciate what makes such success possible, including the trust and loyalty of your existing customers and team. By embracing gratitude, you can not only develop stronger relationships but also foster a positive mindset that helps drive sustainable sales growth.

#### ➔ Why gratitude matters

Gratitude isn't just a feel-good emotion—it's a powerful practice that can affect all aspects of your business's sales process for the better. It doesn't have to be complicated either. Simply train your mind to recognize and appreciate the opportunities and resources you have as well as the gains you and your team have made, and you may experience resounding benefits across the board.

It all starts at the individual level. For one, taking periodic moments to reflect can help you slow down and reset, which is especially valuable in sales because of the stress that comes with constant rejection and the pressure to meet challenging quotas. It can be easy to let that wear you down, falling into a negative cycle of self-doubt about your sales ability or, if you stick to the manager role, your sense of leadership. But if you instead focus on the positives—such as what you can learn from said rejections about how to adjust your strategy or the resilience displayed by your team members—you can instead

cultivate greater optimism. In turn, you become more able to weather new challenges that arise and keep pursuing potentially lucrative leads.

Of course, expressing gratitude can be even *more* powerful than simply feeling it. Showing thankfulness for your team's efforts and performance, for example, can profoundly boost their morale and motivate them to perform at their best. A 2023 study by Gallup and Workhuman found that those who receive recognition are more likely to be top performers dedicated to their duties and less likely to seek other job opportunities. And in a previous report, the organizations surveyed indicated that employees who feel valued also tend to experience less burnout and have better relationships with their coworkers.

As for your customers, making it a point to share your appreciation for them can help you avoid the trap of seeing them merely as numbers or transactional targets. By demonstrating genuine care, you can



The best way to begin is by setting a few minutes aside for it every day. Rather than diving straight into work, try taking a moment to reflect on the positive aspects of your job.

strengthen your ability to build authentic connections with them, fostering greater trust and loyalty that translate to higher sales.

All that said, while gratitude may seem simple in theory, it can easily be overlooked in daily practice without intention. Apply these proven strategies to develop a lasting mindset that can drive meaningful results for you and your team.

#### ➔ Start your day with reflection

The best way to begin is by setting a few minutes aside for it every day. Rather than diving straight into work, try taking a moment to reflect on the positive aspects of your job—perhaps you had a recent professional win, such as receiving an especially promising referral. Consider jotting down your thoughts as well, which may help solidify the feeling of gratitude. You don't need

to give it too much commitment: just a quick acknowledgement or single sentence will suffice to set the right tone for your workday.

#### ➔ Recognize your team's contributions

As indicated earlier, sales can often feel like a thankless job, so make a habit to deliver such thanks for your team's contributions. You can do this in daily meetings, a monthly company newsletter, or other





You can further amplify the powerful effects of gratitude by encouraging your team to express appreciation for one another. For instance, consider creating a forum on your communication system where they can celebrate each other's achievements and hard work.

communications, giving both general recognition and individual callouts; experiment to find the frequency that resonates best and yields the greatest impact. You could also institute more formal expressions of gratitude, like instituting an employee of the month program, or plan surprise tokens of thanks, including an extra day off or gift card to a local restaurant. The latter type gift is particularly effective since you can tailor it to an individual's interests, helping you show your gratefulness in a meaningful way.

#### → Foster team building

You can further amplify the powerful effects of gratitude by encouraging your team to express appreciation for one another. For instance, consider creating a forum on your communication system where they can celebrate each other's achievements and hard work. Seemingly small gestures like these can be

surprisingly contagious and foster a culture of positivity, collaboration, and efficiency while better preparing employees to tackle challenges with confidence and persistence.

#### → Appreciate your customers

Likewise, recognizing the value of your customers is crucial for

sustained sales. Find ways to consistently show them how much they mean to you, such as by offering discounts and other perks through a loyalty program. Inviting them into an exclusive club will incentivize them to return and actively engage with your brand. Equally impactful are nonmonetary

demonstrations, including allowing active customers to preorder or get sneak peaks of new products and services. By incorporating gratitude-driven practices like these into your strategies, you can make them feel like part of your inner circle, fostering stronger customer loyalty and, ultimately, long-term success.

Once you fully embrace gratitude, you'll begin to see its benefits multiply. And the deeper your commitment to it, the greater its positive impact will be on both your mindset and that of your team. ■

#### Take Action

Start practicing gratitude today by writing down one to two things you're currently thankful for.





# Why Company Culture Matters

Developing strong company values and underpinning them in all your efforts can foster a healthy team—and shape public perception of your brand for the better.

BY LUKE ACREE

**I****N MY TEN YEARS** as president of the referral marketing agency ReminderMedia, I've learned many valuable lessons on leadership. However, none may be more essential than this: for an organization to be successful, every member of every team has to take unified strides toward its goals, and that begins with company culture. Foster one that is cohesive and action oriented, and clients, referral partners, employees, and the entire public at large will feel your quality commitment and infectious energy.

"How," you might ask, "does a leader make this happen?" One of my personal favorite

approaches is to lead not by pushing but by pulling; while the former means being a hard-liner who keeps a team disciplined, the latter means motivating a crew, encouraging their best skills to help them shine.

But that's certainly not the only viable tactic. As the cohost of *Stay Paid*, a sales and marketing podcast, I've had the chance to gain insights from several inspiring business leaders. Here are just a few who offer their own take on company culture as well as ideas for shaping a powerfully productive workplace.





**Tami Bonnell**  
Motivational speaker,  
cochair of EXIT Realty  
Corp. International

Company culture is the consistent atmosphere you create that helps you live your organization’s mission statement and allows your people to grow and connect—but that’s only if you do it properly. If you approach it the wrong way, your team members can instead feel disconnected or like their work doesn’t matter.

The key is to know what you want and why you want it, which will serve as the foundation. Then attract your tribe and empower them to be part of creating your business’s greater culture. After all, job seekers want to be part of something special.

In my organization, for instance, we make an effort to meet people where they are, focusing on solutions rather than problems so they feel encouraged. We also hold meetings throughout the year to discuss our work and culture, starting with special sessions in January. In these, our leaders create an agenda with our regional owners and discuss it with our top brokers, sharing what everyone is doing right. We then disperse this info to our entire team, celebrating the key individuals who helped us in the prior year and giving them credit for their amazing work.



**David Elizondo**  
District director for  
the US Small Business  
Administration,  
San Antonio  
District Office

Company culture influences everything from employee satisfaction and retention to performance and innovation. Let it become too negative or toxic, and you may see widespread disengagement, high turnover, and other hindrances to your organization’s long-term success. To create a healthier environment, always lead by example, encourage open communication (including collaboration across departments), recognize and reward your team members’ achievements, and invest in their development. There is value here because their growth can lead to more efficient business operations.

The best way to ensure that you’re on track is to periodically assess whether your workplace values, communication efforts, and leadership style align with your employees’ needs. If possible, gather feedback from departing staff to identify common reasons for leaving. This could provide insights into recurring problems, whether they’re related to the work environment or career growth opportunities. And remember to check in with your team to gauge their satisfaction and make adjustments when necessary. Creating an atmosphere where employees feel heard and valued can boost morale and reduce turnover.



**Dr. John L. Terry, III**  
Founder of Black Belt Leadership,  
president of Real Life Management

It’s important that you clearly define your company’s values and actively communicate them to your employees, vendors, and target audiences. In my work advising martial arts studio owners, one of the big challenges is creating a distinct identity from their peers. I regularly ask them, “What do you want to be known for?” and help them craft a vision statement around that. For example, owners who link their vision to a cause in their local community differentiate themselves from those just teaching martial arts, making their schools more attractive to people who identify with or want to support their efforts.

Additionally, good leaders are intentional about hiring for a “culture fit” and engaging in regular team-building activities that are designed to reinforce it. They also understand that what gets rewarded gets repeated and strive to not only foster a climate of personal and professional growth but also reward the values they want to see lived out within their organization. It starts with you, however. People do what people see, so you should always be the catalyst for positive change by modeling the behaviors, actions, and attitudes you seek from your employees. Once you do, team members will operate at the highest level, providing exceptional service that encourages client loyalty—and invites potential clients to experience it for themselves.

**Take  
Action**

Revisit your organization’s mission statement, then think of at least three ways that you can actualize it in your company’s culture.



MIDJOURNEY



About the author: Luke Acree is an authority on leadership, a lead-generation specialist, and a referral expert who has helped more than 30,000 entrepreneurs and small businesses grow their companies. He hosts *Stay Paid*, a sales and marketing podcast, and has been featured in *Entrepreneur*, *Forbes*, and *Foundr.com*.

# The Business Benefits of Wellness Programs

Enacting health initiatives could help improve employee morale, boost productivity, and reduce costs, offering small businesses a simple yet impactful way to enhance engagement and long-term success. BY FAITH FIORILE



## OVER THE COURSE OF LEADING YOUR TEAM, YOU'VE LIKELY

realized that their performance is directly tied to their physical and mental well-being. The more energy and confidence they have, the more focused and engaged they are, leading to higher production and better outcomes overall. So why not implement wellness programs that can help encourage your employees to take care of themselves? Though doing so may involve some costs, it could prove well worth the investment, serving as a viable strategy for long-term growth.

### →] What is a wellness program?

On the surface, the term “wellness program” is relatively self-explanatory: it is essentially *any* initiative designed to promote a healthy lifestyle among a workplace’s staff. Note the emphasis on “any”—there is virtually no limit to the number of wellness categories and program types to choose from. Consider these examples:

- **Physical:** gym membership reimbursement, on-site fitness classes, nutrition education
- **Mental:** meditation and mindfulness apps (such as Calm), stress management workshops
- **Financial:** lifestyle spending accounts (LSAs), financial counseling and planning







Other possible categories include social, occupational, intellectual, and environmental. Though these four may be less obvious in their benefits, they all contribute to a greater sense of well-being that may help your employees bring their best selves to work.

### →] Key upsides

There are many ways investing in a wellness program can provide significant advantages to your organization, both on a micro level and a macro one.

#### **Reduced sick days and health-care costs**

Simply put, the healthier an employee is, the less often they will need to call off work, whether due to a mental-health day or physical illness. In addition to fortifying individuals' immune systems, fitness-focused and informative programs may help them reduce their risk or symptoms of chronic issues that may require more appointments, which not only take them away from their work but also incur more medical costs.

This benefit has been known for years. For example, a *Harvard Business Review* article from 2010 noted

that Johnson & Johnson reported a significant decline in team members who smoked, had high blood pressure, and were physically inactive after the company launched its wellness programs—resulting in an estimated \$250 million in savings on health care over the previous decade.

#### **Increased engagement and efficiency**

Heightened stress and anxiety can reduce focus and motivation, leading to burnout and, in turn, decreased productivity and more errors. Programs focused on mental health can help combat this by offering employees essential tools for handling pressure in both their personal and professional lives, enabling them to relieve mental fatigue. Even financial, social, and environmental initiatives can have an impact; the former may assist in easing challenges caused by monetary stress, while the latter two can offer uplifting experiences to create a sense of fulfillment. Prioritize these core factors, and you may ultimately cultivate a happier, more efficient team.

#### **Better retention**

Besides better output, such engagement can also increase the

chances that your employees will stay put—many studies indicate that burnout is one of the top reasons for leaving a job. Further, health-focused initiatives demonstrate that you have an interest in their well-being, helping them feel valued and supported to inspire greater loyalty to your company. The results are reduced turnover and the associated costs of hiring and training.

Starting a wellness program doesn't require a massive budget. Begin with something simple, such as introducing flexible hours or encouraging regular breaks to refresh your team's mindset, then build from there. Even small shifts in your company's culture can lead to positive changes in employee satisfaction and performance. ■

#### **Take Action**

Consider the needs of your workforce, and determine one or two small-scale wellness programs you could easily initiate as a starting point.

The inclusion of useful tips is one of the top reasons 58 percent of recipients have referred the professional who sent them the magazine in the past 12 months.



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## Front of Tear Out Card 2



### The Four Pillars of Influence

Practice these virtually foolproof strategies, and you may just boost your organization's credibility to new heights and convert more leads.

• • • •



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## Back of Tear Out Card 2

**1**

**SHARE ACCOLADES**

• • • •

Treat marketing like a job interview: showcase your qualifications and recognition to convince your audience that you're worth their business. New to the game? Leverage your organization's credentials, sharing how many years it has been in business, how many clients it has served, and if it has won any local awards.

**2**

**TOUT TESTIMONIALS**

• • • •

Just as you read reviews when shopping online, consumers peruse your business's ratings to gauge the value of your offerings. Encourage customer reviews on your socials, and share stellar ones everywhere you can, working story-based testimonials into your marketing as well.

**3**

**FORGE PARTNERSHIPS**

• • • •

Think of establishing partnerships as building trust by association. Name six noncompeting companies that serve the same client base as you, then reach out to work with them for collaborative events and other marketing opportunities. For example, if you're a local financial adviser, partner with an estate-planning attorney to serve your clients in a synergistic way.

**4**

**PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL CONTENT**

• • • •

Distributing information relevant to your niche elevates your credibility because people want to buy products and services from knowledgeable experts. To showcase your proficiency, discuss your subject matter in social media, blogs, newsletters, and more. The more consistently you do so, the greater your influence will be.



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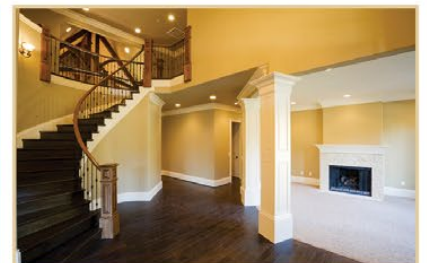
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