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Inspire is a community that attracts and empowers more women to take on leadership roles within the financial advice profession.

Creating a Great Work Culture

At a recent Inspire event we held an exercise where we separated our guests into several discussion groups, employees and employers/managers, we asked the employees to discuss what their employers did that they appreciated and what areas needed further work to add greater value. We asked the employers to discuss what they thought their teams valued the most.

Without knowing both groups agreed creating a great culture and workplace flexibility added the most value!

Flexibility in the workplace allows employers and employees to make arrangements about working conditions that suit them. This helps employees maintain a work/life balance, reduces stress levels and can help employers improve the productivity and efficiency of their business.

With 80% of women becoming mothers at some point, all the tools exist for mothers to work remotely, providing them with greater flexibility to care for their children without guilt. Research shows that mothers working from home can be more productive; if more mothers had the ability to work from home maybe they would be valued more for their productivity, not the time spent in the office.

Creating a great work culture is more than creating flexible working arrangements, it's about creating trust, mutual respect and having fun in the office.

It all begins with hiring the right people, hiring for passion and commitment first, experience second, and credentials third. There is no shortage of impressive CVs, but trying to find people who are interested in the same things as you is harder. You don't want to be a stepping stone in an employee's journey toward their own (very different) passion. Asking the right questions is key to hiring long-term passionate team members.

Once you have the right people, you need to do the right things to ensure you keep them. Communicate regularly and discuss what's working and what isn't. It's critical to take note of your victories, but it's just as important to analyse the things that aren't working so well.

People need to feel safe and trusted, to understand that they can speak freely without fear and encouraged to use their initiative.

Open discussion is great but listening is equally important. Great cultures grow around people who listen, not just to each other or to their clients. Additionally, it's also important to listen to what's happening outside your walls, what do we need to do to continue

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to evolve, what's our next project? Keep moving, maintain the energy and enthusiasm with new projects and have a lot of fun.

A culture of passion can be compromised by the wrong people, a gossiper or whiner can be one of the most destructive corporate weeds. Whiners aren't necessarily open with their complaints, they don't stand up in meetings and articulate their issues. Instead, they move through the organisation, speaking privately, sowing doubt, strangling passion. Create a philosophy of 'NO TRIANGLES'. No gossiping behind another's back, if someone has done something to offend or upset, you act swiftly to resolve the issue quickly and directly and move on. A policy that calls people out when this happens is necessary. Sometimes people simply aren't a good fit, our passion isn't theirs, constructive criticism is healthy, but relentless complaining is toxic, identify these types, act and move on.

Your team needs to enjoy the space they work in, creating an environment that is comfortable and enjoyable to work in is crucial. Doing the little things to show you care and value your team is key.

Surprising your team with ad hoc surprises and treats, having the kitchen cupboards stocked with favourite treats, monthly massages, fun birthday surprises, in house lunches etc. Your team needs to be surprised occasionally so mix it up, do unexpected things that your team will really appreciate.

Always recognise and reward, this does not mean pay rises, although your team needs to be rewarded financially, sitting them down and praising their efforts and letting them know what a wonderful job they are doing, or recognising something they did well, is more gratifying than a few extra dollars.

It's easy to become complacent in a busy work environment, appreciation and recognition is a lot more cost-effective than hiring and training if people move on if they feel under-valued. Creating and maintaining a great culture and environment requires constant attention and goes a long way in maintaining happy employees that enjoy coming into the office each day!