

Creating a Culture for a Successful Business

Former Southwest Airlines CEO Howard Putnam shares tips for building a culture of success to kick off the 2016 Angus Convention.

by Troy Smith, field editor

Every business has a culture. Every farm and ranch operation has a business culture — an evolving set of collective beliefs, values and attitudes that influence management decisions and all business functions, from production to accounting. Howard Putnam, former CEO for Southwest Airlines, believes every organization or business that starts with passion has a better chance of achieving sustainability.

“Innovation helps fuel the passion, but you have to develop the culture to support it,” advised Putnam during the 2016 Angus Convention hosted by the American Angus Association in Indianapolis, Ind. The businessman and author of *The Winds of Turbulence* delivered the keynote address Nov. 6 for the convention’s Angus University General Session, sponsored by Merck Animal Health. He emphasized the importance of developing a culture that makes employees and customers feel important.

To illustrate the point, Putnam shared a story about dining at a restaurant with family, including his then 5-year-old son. Unlike many waitstaff, their waitress had paid an unusual amount of attention to the small boy, furnishing him with a booster seat and his own menu.

Basking in the attention, the youngster said, “Hey Mom, she thinks I’m a people.”

“Regardless of the kind of business you have, you must treat your customers like important people,” stated Putnam, emphasizing that it starts with recognizing the importance of your employees or co-workers.

“Take care of your employees and their families, and your employees will want to take care of your customers,” added Putnam, “and it all works for the benefit of our company and its shareholders.”

To build a good employee force, Putnam advised managers to hire on the basis of “attitude.” While skill sets can be taught and learned, Putnam believes employee attitude is largely innate. He advised managers to



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► Angus Media interviewed Howard Putnam for its Nov. 7 episode of *The Angus Report*. To watch that interview, visit <http://bit.ly/AU-Putnam-TAR>.

seek employee traits including cheerfulness, optimism and a willingness to communicate. Look for self-confident, self-starting team-spirited people possessing a sense of humor.

To be better leaders, Putnam advised managers to remember that employees need to know what it is that the company and their leader stand for. They need role models, but managers do too. Putnam urged managers to seek and emulate role models with ethics. He also recommended that managers encourage employees to take ownership of how well the business performs. Details matter, so encourage employees to pay attention to the small stuff.

Putnam said effective leadership fosters team effort, where “nobody sings solo.” He warned managers against indulging in self-importance.

“Humbling yourself before employees does wonders for company morale,” shared Putnam, noting how employees love to see the boss poke fun at himself.

As one of his frequent airplane analogies, Putnam likened life to a propeller with five blades representing family, work, church, community and personality traits. Letting these get out of balance can eventually cause you to crash and burn.

“Everyone needs balance between their work and their private life,” said Putnam. “I encourage you to occasionally try something outside your comfort zone. It can help restore the balance.”

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For more news from the Angus Convention — including summaries, speaker presentations, photos, videos and more — visit the convention newsroom at www.angus.media/news/Angus-Convention.

Editor’s Note: Troy Smith is a freelance writer and cattleman from Sargent, Neb.