

Your Passion is Killing Your Company.

February 2013 Newsletter

Your obsession with keeping your culture pure leads you to make poor hiring decisions and blinds you to talented people who could help your company grow.

It may sound like heresy, but not everyone in your company has to love spending an afternoon hanging from a frozen waterfall or paddling down Class 5 rapids. Instead, you should look for the best talent and build your culture through shared experiences.

Here's the problem: while you're working to preserve your unique culture of hard-core ice climbers, you've missed the virtuoso who could straighten out your credit department, but who smokes a pack of Luckys a day and prefers Twinkies to tofu. Sure, your culture remains pure, but your DSOs explode and your bank gets cranky.

Let's face it: ice climbers (or white water rafters, or backcountry skiers) who have the skills and desire to work in the accounting or credit departments are about as common as environmentalists at Exxon. They're out there, but there aren't many. When you restrict your hiring to candidates with the same interests and passions as you, you're needlessly sacrificing operational excellence on the altar of athletic purity.

Corporate culture is important, but that doesn't mean that you have to populate your firm with ice climbers. It's a false choice.

At the Outdoor University session, *Keeping Your Brand Promise*, Bruce Palmer of NOLS explained that everyone who works at the company either has been on a NOLS trip, or goes on one shortly after hiring. The shared experience of the wilderness trip is essential to strengthening their culture.

What if your company doesn't do something as (relatively) accessible as a NOLS trip? No problem.

When I worked at Asics, we had a plenty of non-runners in the company. We didn't require them to run a marathon, or even a 10K to join the firm. But we did ask everyone to work at a minimum of one race expo so that they could meet the runners and retailers who were so passionate about our brand. Similarly, Toms Shoes connects employees with the company's mission by requiring everyone to go on a "[shoe drop](#)," where they hand out shoes to poor kids around the world.

If you make ice-climbing gear, send your employees to a climbing competition. Let them watch and experience the passion. They can help the local retailers serve coffee to the athletes or bring inventory from the store. If you make backcountry skis, have them attend a mountain demo day.

Experiences like this will connect your employees with your customers and consumers, reinforce your culture, and strengthen your relationship with the retailers as well.

Stop trying to hire your culture. Instead, *build* your culture. Get the best people, and develop your culture through shared experiences. Then you'll have a great culture—and more importantly, a great company.