





Changing a company culture can be a tricky business. For **Marco Ferroni** and his team at Lainox recognizing the positive effect of people power is essential for success, reports Andrea Tolu

Words like ‘values’, ‘teamwork’ and ‘change’ are often thrown around in the business world, ending up overworked and nearly void of meaning. What gets lost is the main reason why these terms are so important: they can make the difference between market leaders and everyone else. Marco Ferroni was aware of all that when he became executive director of Lainox in 2012, and he set about to change the company’s culture and apply those concepts in earnest. Lainox’s brand emerged revitalized from this process, and in 2013, the company launched Naboo, the first multi-function oven connected to the cloud and programmable remotely. With Naboo, Lainox transformed from a manufacturer of multi-function ovens to a 2.0 ‘application company.’ The interviews with Ferroni and three members of his team could be a textbook



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case study of how a brand can effectively evolve alongside a changing foodservice market by putting the focus back on people. For Ferroni, ‘people are important’ is a gross understatement. In fact, they can make or break a company. “People are both the engine and the fuel,” he says. “A company with a mediocre product but the right people has more chances of success than one with a great product but people who are not motivated and passionate about the market.” “The right people’ in this case are those whose values are aligned with the company’s. Values and attitudes are not something you can change, so managers need to know who to hire. To do that, however, it’s necessary to go back to the drawing board and redefine values. It’s a discovery process that Ferroni started a few years ago, making sure to involve everyone. Eventually, they chose



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ten values that best represent the brand, such as trust, result-oriented and team spirit. (And because transparency is also one of those values, the full list can be found on the Lainox website.) Typically, after this type of groundwork some employees may find out they are not really on board. “Of course, not everyone identified with our values. Those are the people who tend to leave,” says Ferroni. **THE MYTH OF THE MOTIVATING MANAGER** Once you have the right people, it’s about making them work together towards the same goal. Here, there are a few basic steps to follow. One is to set clear objectives for teams and individuals in order to keep the right balance between the two levels. What also helps Lainox is that they much prefer team players. “We don’t like hotshots,” says Ferroni.



Guido Gritti, Lainox's director of operations and R&D, who manages a team of 91, explains another of the fundamentals. "Everyone is different, some thrive under pressure and some don't perform well with heavy workloads. To get the best out of a team, you need to get to know the people, using a clear and transparent style of communication."

Transparency also works at an individual level. "Since I started in Lainox, I feel I'm much more professional," says Alberto Marzocchi, sales director for Lainox Asia. "Sharing experiences with colleagues was fundamental for my growth."

The one thing a manager is not supposed to do, however, is motivate people. "We're not motivators," says Ferroni, "we set targets and then coach and help people so they can reach them."

Giancarlo Roig, Lainox's export manager for Latin America, explains that with a

metaphor. "You can't tell a plant to grow, but you can create the best conditions for it to grow. The same happens with people."

According to Roig, providing the best conditions for people to grow means setting clear objectives, allowing employees to have open discussions and share ideas and trusting them by giving them the autonomy to make their own decisions so they can gain experience and confidence. "Yes, sometimes they can make mistakes, but they can learn from them. If you don't allow them to act freely and make their own decisions they lose motivation."

These remarks hint at one of the side effects of truly considering people 'both the engine and the fuel'. In turn, they feel trusted and have more freedom. That can have a great impact. For Marzocchi, "feeling trusted and being part of a company that isn't afraid to compete in the global market" is the strongest motivator.



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MAKING PEACE WITH CHANGE

The words of Marco Ferroni and the members of his team are remarkably in tune, and that gives an idea of how far Lainox has come in the process of aligning both the team and the brand's values.

"When I arrived, I found a group of people who were very proud about the brand and also loyal, but they were also reluctant to change because they were not aware of the necessity to evolve with the sector," says Ferroni.

But a brand, however prestigious, has no magical power, and the market waits for no one. Change is, therefore, necessary, but first you need to convince people to accept that.

So here comes the caveat: it's hard, daily work in a continuous process with possibly no end in sight. In addition, you have to sweat the small stuff. "Changing a company's culture is comprised of 1,000



Lainox believe change is necessary, but employees first need to be convinced of it in order to accept it



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different things and keeping everyone on the same boat is my hardest challenge," says Ferroni.

Working with employees to increase their awareness about the company and themselves – even through less conventional paths such as meditation workshops and a holistic trainer, as Ferroni did – is likely to be met with scepticism at first, but constancy, another one of the company's values, worked extremely well for Lainox.

In fact, rewards can arrive every day, if one knows where to look. "Sometimes even the way a team member formulated an email can be a source of satisfaction," says Gritti. Or, rewards can come from the quality of the relationships.

"The greatest satisfaction – even greater than my portfolio of products – comes from the trust I have in the people working with me," says Roig. ■