

ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Listening Makes a Big Difference

December 3, 2014



The New Home Company LLC has built nine housing communities across the state since 2009 and is working on building 10 more.

New Home CEO Larry Webb says the secret isn't "sticks or bricks or land" but rather people – those who build the houses and those who make their homes in them.

Webb talked about his management strategy, shared throughout the company, which is to keep his employees happy and excited to come to work.

Q. How does your company recruit and retain top talent?

A. My three partners and I have this idea that home building is all about people, all about your employees and customers. It's about hiring the best people in the industry and creating an environment for them to do the best work of their lives.

Our hiring and recruiting process is pretty diligent. We start with great people to begin with, and then we want to put it in an environment where they can grow, be heard, be listened to, and have opportunities for the future.

Q. Can you describe the opportunities your employees have to provide input on the company and the way it's run.

A. We survey employees confidentially every year, and 95 percent of employees submit surveys. I read every single survey and present what I hear, both good and bad. Where things need to be improved, we do that.

One of the challenges when you have half of your staff in the field is it's much harder to create a culture that is the same everywhere. In an office workplace, you can do that. But we try to make sure everyone's on the same page and understands our philosophy.

We also have growth reviews. I have a very strong belief that every employee has the right and deserves to have honest conversations with their bosses, two-way conversations about what works and what doesn't work. Over the years, I have learned so much from the growth reviews and surveys.

I remember years ago, I got a survey back that said, "I'm a veteran. My wife and kids get Veterans Day off, and I don't." From that day on, veterans in my company get Veterans Day off. It's little things like that we try to do to make their experiences better.

Q. What are some of the ways your company keeps its employees happy and motivated?

A. We don't have a human resources department. We have a people department. There's an old joke that HR's not very human and not a very good resource. We want our people department to be allies of the staff and to care about them from before they get hired to as long as they work in the organization.

Every quarter, we try to have a fun day. We'll go to the Del Mar race track as a team, and we have picnics and holiday parties. Our "fun committee" plans these events. We had this idea that building homes for people and changing people's lives ought to be a fun thing.

Q. Is it by design that some of your corporate philosophies and employee benefits are similar to those of new tech startups?

A. We have that kind of energy and openness, I get that. What's a little different for us is that we actually produce stuff that people can see and feel.

We don't just survey our employees. We also survey our customers and relay the results to all our employees. I want our staff to be really proud of the houses we build. So we share the good surveys and the bad surveys.

I'm a fanatic about reading surveys. It's a way for us to improve and hear from our customers. The rest of our company believes in that, too. Really, most of this isn't me. I'm just a conduit for a pretty exciting group of humans.