

CULTURE CLUB



You don't have to be back in the office to foster a strong company culture. Five fresh ways to engage your employees inside *and* outside the office

With employee meetings, sales conferences and local teambuilding experiences on pause, company cultures have taken a hit during the pandemic. As employers know, company culture isn't just about boosting morale and motivation among employees—it's something that can impact productivity, retention and the overall financial health of the business. And in a talent-starved post-pandemic economy—it's more critical than ever to recruiting new employees.

Ready for some good news? Your workforce doesn't have to be back in the office to experience the benefits of a boost in company culture. We recently sat down with SongDivision Founder Andy Sharpe to discuss employee engagement strategies for the post-pandemic era. SongDivision has been engaging live audiences for more than 18 years through interactive songwriting experiences featuring some of the world's best musicians. In 2020, SongDivision pivoted into virtual, and today, they are offering an entirely new approach to boosting engagement among employees and bringing that all important corporate culture back—in black. (We had to say it.)

Your people are your greatest asset. Crank up your favorite tunes and read on for important insights on how to win 'em—and keep 'em—through the power of music.



Andy Sharpe
Founder & CEO
SongDivision

Event Marketer: *After a long hiatus from their office cultures, many employees are feeling disconnected. What can companies do to engage their remote workforce?*

Andy Sharpe: The most important thing companies can do is **encourage a culture of real human connection**. Team members need to make time for real conversations—on the phone or via Zoom, but not via text or email. Without physical spaces enabling us to bump into each other from time to time, we have to be conscious of creating random interactions. The goal with these interactions is to get past the actual projects everyone is working on and have a proper chat! Conversations are the bedrock of relationships, and relationships are what create an engaged workforce.

TIP #1 **Managers Must Take the Lead**

"Managers play a key role in establishing culture by reaching out to their teams regularly through scheduled one-on-ones and encouraging their people to further connect," says Sharpe.

EM: *How do those same ideas apply to those who are coming back to the office for the first time?*

AS: Relationship-building isn't just important in a remote or hybrid world. As people return to the office, it should remain a top priority for companies looking to establish an engaged, connected culture. Expect a readjustment period for returning employees, and be patient—it takes time to establish routines and get comfortable with the environment, and your people may naturally feel less social at the onset.

TIP #2 **Ice Breakers are Key**

"At the start of many SongDivision team building sessions, we get people to share their first concert and another 'fun fact' that their teammates wouldn't know about them," Sharpe says. "Even this small piece of new information can break the ice and lead to longer conversations over time. The stronger the relationships, the stronger the culture."

EM: *For event marketers who plan internal events, how can music play a role in boosting morale and inspiring employees?*

AS: Experiencing music as a group, especially through the co-creation of music, is deeply tied to relationship development, heightened emotion, retention and recall. There is a lot of science at work here. In particular, experiencing music as a group provides a release of dopamine, making us feel energized, motivated, and engaged, as well as oxytocin, making us feel more deeply connected to those around us. Music also ties deeply to memory, enabling us to retain and recall information from the experience more readily. Collaboration, strategy, creativity—if you want those ingredients in your company culture, you may want to experiment with making some amazing music together.

TIP #3**Make it Creative—and Meaningful**

“No audience, corporate audiences included, wants to be condescended to,” says Sharpe. “They want to feel something real, they want to feel connected to their colleagues, and they love it when they’re included in a truly creative process and achieve something together they didn’t think was possible.”

EM: *What are most companies missing when it comes to employee engagement and culture building?*

AS: If a company isn’t crystal clear on the purpose and core values that guide it, team members (including management) will inevitably clash. If purpose and core values are clearly defined and shared regularly throughout the organization, the company will: 1) attract the right people who are motivated and engaged, 2) operate more efficiently and innovatively with everyone working toward the same purpose, and 3) deliver consistent, meaningful results to clients and customers.

TIP #4**Focus on Your Purpose**

“When purpose and values are not clear, it becomes a very ‘class-based society,” says Sharpe. “Focus turns to ‘what’ not ‘why’, often with a healthy dose of internal competition and micro-management.”

EM: *If you can offer a word of advice for companies worried about getting their employees motivated for the year ahead, what would it be?*

AS: Infuse team building that reinforces your company’s purpose and core values regularly (e.g. every quarter). There is no one-off ‘silver bullet’ team building experience. Strong company culture is developed through repetition and the ongoing, cumulative effect of regularly uniting your team around your purpose. The key is consistency.

TIP #5**It’s OK to test Comfort Zones**

“Another key is to ever so slightly take people out of their comfort zone with each experience—not a lot, just a touch,” says Sharpe. “Doing so enables people to move beyond the daily worries of the office and creates enough space for them to learn, create, and connect together.”

EM: *One more question: what are some fresh and fun ways to engage internal teams who are both coming back and staying home?*

AS: We’ve recently launched our new ‘Culture Club’ offering, developed in partnership with global L&D experts, Synaptic Potential. Culture Club consists of a series of six-part training programs specifically designed to strengthen company culture in remote, in-person, and hybrid working environments. For example, our ‘Leadership Track’ is broken down into six 90-minute sessions covering critical leadership skills like inspiring team cohesion, creating a culture of belonging, being a great storyteller, and infusing creativity into your business.

Participants learn practical skills to improve their own performance and the performance of their teams—they commit to behavioral changes (which are measured), all while strengthening relationships with their colleagues. **Unique musical experiences maintain engagement and help people learn,** and the songs created during the sessions capture the core content and ensure learnings are retained. These programs will predominantly be delivered virtually to guarantee shared experiences between those in the office and those working remotely.

INTERESTED IN BUILDING A STRONGER COMPANY CULTURE USING THE SCIENCE OF MUSIC?

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