

KEY TAKEAWAYS

How to Build Team Culture

People often asked how we got so much done as such a small firm.

Our effectiveness was the result of having the right clients, a deeply experienced team, and a culture designed to do impactful work.

Below, we've reflected on some of the key ingredients that played an outsized role and that we stand behind—they're insights that scaled the firm's collective learning in new ways, and ones that our team will carry with us.



Align on a collective purpose.

Our team was animated and unified around the vision and "why" of our work captured by our core belief statement. The work was hard enough, so belief and unity of purpose was a critical starting point.



Work together.

We shared success by actively supporting each other's projects and leveraging the "collective OI brain" to develop insights and solutions that wouldn't have been possible with a single person. This included the extensive research we gathered for projects from external sources, including a broad network of colleagues we tapped for insights. We never reinvented the wheel, but sought instead to build on one another's work constantly adapting, improving, and seeking feedback to iterate our work and make it better. Our last project always informed the next, guiding us to build upon our learnings every step of the way and deliver the best solutions to our clients and ourselves.



Communicate openly and often.

Whether in our interactions with clients or as an internal team, we erred on the side of making sure everyone was in the loop. We knew email was good for transactions but not discussions, so we hopped on the phone or initiated a face-to-face meeting to share important updates, work through a problem, or brainstorm a solution. We valued feedback, both giving and receiving, as an act of respect, vulnerability, generosity, and commitment to the growth and well-being of others and ourselves.

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Celebrate what actually matters.

We had success in terms of growth—clients, projects, and revenue—but we never had a team celebration because we hit a revenue high. Instead, our celebrations always focused on big milestones that centered teamwork that helped clients unleash more money to combat fundamental issues of our time.



Prioritize team, not hierarchy.

Twice a year we retreated to beautiful locations to spend time with each other and generate new ideas — absent of hierarchy and where everyone's opinions were valued — a practice we also modeled in our client engagements. Those retreats bonded us together in a way we couldn't have achieved otherwise.



Support and mentor all team members.

With less experienced team members, we built scaffolding to support them as they took on more responsibility, providing coaching and support along the way. We talked explicitly about the uncomfortable things that may emerge with clients who weren't accustomed to taking guidance from younger team members and women of color. For example, one of our teammates said: "I always felt prepared, safe, protected, resourced, and supported to lead. Our leadership helped navigate the soft skills, like when someone doesn't listen to you."



Stay open to learning about diverse perspectives.

We were intentional about understanding and supporting the perspectives of people who are systematically marginalized. For our team, this meant we valued diverse colleagues and the unique experiences and networks that each of us brought. We looked for ways to incorporate new learnings to continuously improve our work, were willing to change our minds, and took risks in service of fighting for what is right.