



Katie Burke: A Winning Workplace Culture Starts with Time, Love, and Attention

How HubSpot Earned the Top Workplaces Award Seven Years Straight



[HubSpot](#) is on a mission to “make marketing people love,” and clearly, they’re well on the way. The 10-year-old Massachusetts-based company, virtually synonymous with inbound marketing, has more than 20,000 customers in 90 countries along with some 3,100 agency partners. And, HubSpot says, “We aren’t just helping companies globally grow, we’re helping more than one thousand employees grow personally and professionally.”

That commitment to employee growth has helped HubSpot earn *The Boston Globe* [Top Workplaces](#) award seven straight years. That’s an amazing feat given HubSpot is benchmarked against 55 other Top Workplaces. So, rather than merely competing with the average organization in its industry or region, HubSpot goes up against [Top Workplaces](#) across the United States.

HubSpot’s winning ways stem largely from its focus on two key areas: communication and development of managers. To learn more, we spoke with [Katie Burke](#), Vice President



of Culture & Experience at HubSpot. Asked about HubSpot's Top Workplaces longevity, Burke said, "Our wins are a direct reflection of our team and the great work they do every day. And frankly, it's about how accountable they hold all of us for creating a great experience for their peers, for candidates, for alumni, and for our customers."

Burke said she is often asked if there is a secret to creating a successful corporate culture. "There's no silver bullet," she said. "We spend an inordinate amount of time and energy on culture, innovation, on responding to employee feedback—and I think that shows. We put as much time, love, and attention into helping ensure employee success as we do every other part of our business. And I think our employees feel that every day."

Why make such a commitment? Burke said, "We believe that the business and its culture are irrevocably linked and that the culture inherently drives the business success. We see culture very much as a day-to-day business priority."

+19%
COMMUNICATION
DOWN

"I feel well-informed about important decisions at HubSpot."

HubSpot scored 19 percent better than its competitors in the IT: Vertical Industry Software Products and Services benchmark.

Source: 2016 [Workplace Survey](#)

Improving Access and Introducing Elephants

Looking at HubSpot's [2016 Workplace Survey](#) results, a couple of things stand out. First, it scores especially high on the statement, *I feel well-informed about important decisions at this company*. Clearly, employees feel they're in the loop. How does that happen? Burke said every piece of company information is democratized and distributed in an especially active company wiki.

"The idea is that every single person — from intern to executive — has access to our management team deck, our Board deck. Our employees can see what my priorities are. They can see what our CEO's priorities are," Burke said. "We share a lot of information, and then we spend a lot of time on translating what the information means to help people do their jobs better."

Burke said the bad news is shared right along with the good. "If there's something that's going wrong, employees are going to hear about it from us and they're going to hear it *directly* from us," she said. "We're big believers in introducing the elephant in the room."

Employees see the results — all of them — of quarterly surveys. At informal "spotlight meetings," they can ask questions of company leaders. One company vice president blogs to the entire organization. Burke said, "Those types of things seem small, but they set us apart."

Better Managers through Modeling, Sharing, and Investing

HubSpot also scored high on the OrgHealth statement, *My manager cares about my concerns*. People at the organization believe their managers make it easy for them to do their jobs and work at their full potential. At HubSpot, employees look up one level and they say, "Yeah, my manager is great." How does that happen? Burke pointed to three things:

1 Model great behavior.

Burke said, "One thing we've done a lot of in the last two years is circle back a bit to our managers to say, 'How can we help you get better?' and then ask our employees, 'What





do you really want out of your manager? What would make a great coach? How can that person help you succeed?”

She said, “A key to our success there is that we try to model great behavior. So our CEO talks a lot about what it takes to make a great manager and a great leader. The entire executive team participates in our first-time manager training.”

2 Share through content.

Not surprisingly, a company built on sharing great stories with content uses content to share stories of great behavior.

Burke said, “Kim Scott’s article on [radical candor](#) was hugely popular here because it really encouraged the type of feedback and dialogues we’re asking our managers to have on a day-to-day basis. We invited Kim to speak at our INBOUND conference, which we hold with 14,000 of our closest friends. So we really try and make management not just an internal priority but an external priority, as well.”

3 Invest in resources.

HubSpot helps managers grow, but also encourages them to share what works. Burke said, “We have a program called the Manager Mindset. It helps people find their authentic leadership style and learn the day-to-day ins and outs of being a manager.”

Less formal resources include reading lists. “If you’re someone who learns more passively, we’ll pay for those books for you so you can read them on your own time. And we’ll also cultivate and create that list.”

4 And finally...fun.

“We have a lot of fun every day,” she said. “Our CEO is fond of saying that he still laughs – belly laughs – multiple times a day from being here. I tell people that while we take our work incredibly seriously we don’t take ourselves too seriously.”

Burke said, “One of the things that has to happen when you’re building a Top Workplace is to say, ‘If you do this, this will happen. If you do this, this will happen.’ I think just like great cooking, in great cultures the employees want to feel the key ingredients: love, attention, care, and empathy. But the experience has to be fun, as well as intense and challenging.”

