

## National International Office

## Commentary

# To Be Great, You Must Be Good

In this **EXCLUSIVE** commentary, Mark Rose, chair and CEO of Avison Young, talks about how culture drives revenues and profits rather than the other way around.

By **Lisa Brown**

In the wake of the catastrophic flooding and human tragedy in Texas and Louisiana that resulted from Hurricane Harvey, the words and actions of Jim McIngvale have struck a chord with a sympathetic nation. That is according to Mark Rose, chair and CEO of Avison Young. McIngvale, the Houston-area entrepreneur known as “Mattress Mack,” provided his furniture and mattress stores as places of refuge for those who were displaced by the storm, Rose says. Hundreds of area residents took him up on his very generous offer.

“McIngvale’s compassion is a classic example of a business leader doing the right thing—even when everything seems to point to the fact that it will hurt the bottom line,” he explains. “The reality is that the exact opposite is true. Culture drives revenues and profits rather than the other way around.” In the exclusive commentary below, Rose explains that the truth is that not caring about what your company can do is a missed opportunity. “You will ultimately be far more productive – and profitable – if you focus on who you are before you worry about what you do.



*Avison Young's Mark Rose says to focus on who you are before you worry about what you do.*

*The views expressed below are Mark Rose's own.*

Mattress Mack and his story resonated with me personally, because I am always looking for ways to reinforce purpose at Avison Young. To build a culture of integrity, generosity, trust and compassion. To ensure that every single member of our team understands the value of doing good and being good, and the importance of doing the right thing simply because it's the right thing to do.

The implications of not doing the right thing are significant – even profound. I’ve seen them firsthand. And once you have experienced them, you will never take the power of your company’s purpose for granted again.

### **Hiring, firing and rewarding**

When it comes to hiring, firing and rewarding your employees, the head matters – but the heart matters more. In other words, while it’s natural to focus on innovators and smart, performance-minded professionals, that rationale can’t be all that goes into your decision-making. Your team members *must* have character and heart – and be aligned with your culture and core values.

We all want the best people, but the price of admission at Avison Young is a desire to pull everyone up with you. If you don’t care about your co-workers and your clients, we don’t want you. And that can’t be just lip service. When someone doesn’t behave in accordance with your principles, you *must* be willing to do something about that. It is easier than you think to fire top producers who are not behaving in accordance with your core values. The pain is in the fear, not rooted in the reality. You simply cannot allow behaviors that are a cancer in your company to continue. They are corrosive – and can cause irreparable damage to even the best organizations.

### **Skin in the game**

Being led by your principles means that you will have to be led by your Principals. It all starts at the top. Too often, efforts to create a positive culture flow through the human resources department – or even the marketing department. But if you care about your professional culture and want to build a successful and sustainable enterprise, your leaders must set a positive example, clearly establish expectations and hold themselves and others accountable.

That strategy can be trickier with a public company, simply because serving the interests of public shareholders can sometimes feel antithetical to long-term decision-making. That’s why you need to be fully committed. Your culture can’t be a gimmick. It has to be part of the fabric of your company, and that becomes easier when you create an internal structure to support caring, communication and collaboration. Ideally, you want employees who aren’t cogs in a machine, but have literally and figuratively bought into your mission. Avison Young is Principaled and managed – by individuals who are aligned with our principles and care about the success of the company and the way it operates.

When it comes to recognition, focus less on titles and other trivialities. True recognition means connecting with – and caring about – people, supporting each other in times of trial and tragedy and caring about each other’s friends and families, struggles and successes. Once again, that connectedness starts at the top.

### **Building a healthy company**

A robust wellness program is a critical piece of the cultural puzzle in any workplace. After spontaneously deciding to share my own transformative health and wellness journey with our team members, I challenged everyone to push to do better – and our leaders worked to help all employees help themselves by creating a comprehensive workplace wellness program. There are no mandates – just inspiration. Our insurer even lowered our premiums and chipped in \$50,000 to help us launch our program.

The results have been remarkable, with truly inspiring success stories across the company. One particular success story involves our vice-president of finance in Fort Lauderdale, who just emailed me last week to let me know that after committing to improving her health and wellness in 2014, she lost

more than 80 pounds. She said that her life has been transformed, mentally and physically, and she now wants to help others attain wellness. I get emotional when I read about her story, and many others.

There are countless studies reinforcing how health and wellness improvements make a meaningful bottom-line difference, but to see it first-hand is remarkable. Physical health and wellness lead to mental and emotional health and wellness. You and your team will have more energy, optimism, enthusiasm and productivity.

But wellness is about more than physical health. It's also about emotional well-being. And that requires a safe and supportive environment free of intolerance, where your team members can shed their insecurities and share ideas. A big part of that is valuing and promoting diversity. As a leader, it's your responsibility to cultivate a diversity of opinions, perspectives and skill sets – and it is critical to ensure that you build a team with a wide range of backgrounds, cultures, experiences and ideas.

### **Doing well by doing good**

Building a truly selfless company culture also means giving back. You can't be a Principal of Avison Young if you aren't seen as a leader who gives back to the community and prioritizes charitable works. There's an expectation that we are part of the communities where we operate, and giving back isn't just the right thing to do – it's a responsibility. For example, we have a defined Day of Giving, where we shut down every Avison Young office around the world and spend the day physically working and contributing to different charities.

A positive culture is built on communication – not talking *at* people, but *to* them. And not just leaders talking to other leaders. Make yourself available and

give promising young leaders a voice. They'll have input and they will hold you and each other accountable. The great thing about a strong and authentic culture is that it becomes self-perpetuating.

So, be a good person. Talk less and listen more. Surround yourself with great people. Strive to focus on your professional culture, bring in great people to strengthen it, and create a positive environment where everyone wants to work together and be a part of something special.

If you do, your business and your bottom line will flourish.

**Natalie Dolce**, national executive editor of *GlobeSt.com*, is responsible for working with editorial staff, freelancers and senior management to help plan the overarching vision that encompasses *GlobeSt.com*, including short-term and long-term goals for the website, how content integrates through the company's other product lines and the overall quality of content. Previously she served as editor of the West Coast region for *GlobeSt.com* and *Real Estate Forum*, and was responsible for coverage of news and information pertaining to that vital real estate region. Prior to moving out to the Southern California office, Natalie was Northeast bureau chief, covering New York City for *GlobeSt*. Dolce's background includes a stint at *InStyle Magazine*, and as managing editor with *New York Press*, an alternative weekly New York City paper. In her career, she has also covered a variety of beats for *M magazine*, *Arthur Frommer's Budget Travel*, *FashionLedge.com*, *Co-Ed magazine* and the *Daily Orange* newspaper. Dolce has also freelanced for a number of publications, including *MSNBC.com* and *Museums New York magazine*.