

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/define-culture-early>

Sameer Dholakia, CEO of SendGrid, stresses the importance of establishing a company's values at the start. They will determine your culture, and the type of people you attract. He says a company's culture should be defined in simple and memorable terms, and that it should convey what kinds of individuals have no place in the organization. He cites the "4H" culture at SendGrid: "Happy, Hungry, Humble and Honest."



## Transcript

- Too many companies, I would argue, wait too long to go and establish what kind of values do we want to have as a culture, as a business, as we scale.. Singrid, fortunately, made the decision to invest in that at the very, very outset.. And the reason it matters, I'll get to the next topic, is because the people you are going to attract will be immensely based on values and culture.. And if it's not, by the way, you'll end up with a course correction downstream.. But if you can get it right from the outset, literally sit down and think about, with your partner, what kind of values do we wanna represent as a business.. And then we can proceed from there and build a culture around that.. Lemme give you some examples.. For Singrid, specifically, we have a culture based on something we call the four H's.. Happy, hungry, humble, and honest.. Those are our, and they are core to the way we build our business, the way we run our business, how we interact with one another..

It shows up in every meeting room and every interaction and every review done.. This is how we live and work together.. And it's very clear, it's not just up on the white board.. But I will tell you I've seen a lot of companies and founding teams, even when they do think about doing it early, they'll write down 13 things.. I don't know about you but I'm not smart enough to remember 13 things.. I just can't.. But four H's, boy that's easy.. I got that.. Happy, humble, hungry, and honest.. Okay, even I can remember that..

And by the way, so can the other 425 people that work at Singrid.. And so keeping it simple is super important.. If I were just to give you some advice on if you're thinking about this as an entrepreneur, I would say keep it simple and memorable.. Also make sure that it has some edge.. So it can't be motherhood and apple pie.. It can't be that any person in the labor market, in the talent market, would come to and fit into that culture.. And I will tell you, I have worked in software for 23 years now and I have so many extraordinary professionals and friends who working at Singrid would be their seventh hell.. They would absolutely detest it.. In particular, that humble H would knockout a bunch of extraordinarily talented people that I have worked with in my past.. But that's just not the way they would want to operate..

Our humble H is all about we, not I.. It is team-based.. It has so many characteristics to it that just would screen out a whole set of people.. We do our interviewing and we ask you about what's the thing you're most proud of that you've accomplished to date.. And you literally do a pronoun count.. How many times did they say 'I', and how many times did they say 'we'? And that is a perfect screen and filter for us of are they aligned to our kind of values.. People can say 'I' and be super successful in lots of other companies.. In our company, that's not gonna work...