

The People First
Culture Series

 **breathelife**
an **ELMO** company

Reinventing recruitment for SMEs



| In partnership with **Liberty Mind**

PUBLIC

Introduction

Welcome to the second edition of The People First Culture Series. 2022 is recognised as the 'Year of the Employee', alongside the theme of 'The Great Resignation', which has seen a phenomenal number of individuals reflecting, resetting their priorities and addressing what makes them happy.

It's a crucial time for employers to adapt to an ever-changing world and employee expectations – if you don't offer something they're looking for, it's more than likely another business will.

In July 2022, we surveyed 1298 employees from the UK* and partnered with Lizzie Benton, Company Culture Coach & Founder of Liberty Mind, to delve into the recruitment journey from a culture angle. From the reality of job searching today to the all-important interview process, we wanted to discover just how much company culture truly influenced candidates in choosing their next role.

Do candidates think about company culture when looking for the next step in their career? Are job adverts a true reflection of the expectations or completely unrealistic? What aspects about a company would put an ideal candidate off accepting a role?

As UK employer recruitment needs continue to sit at record levels in 2022, what can businesses do to attract first-class candidates? How can your company create a better recruitment process? And how can company culture have a positive input to the outcome?

Find out the answers to our recruitment questions, alongside practical tips and expert advice to ensure your processes help company culture to flourish and onboard great people.

*Opinium Research was commissioned to conduct a nationwide online survey of 1298 adults (UK workers). The survey was issued during the period 26th-29th July 2022.

Company culture first, dream job second

Company culture is continuing to rank more highly and is taking on even more importance for current candidates. However, the period of self-reflection brought on by the pandemic has meant many are now more conscious about what type of workplace culture they may be getting themselves into.

From our research, 76% of UK workers consider company culture to some degree when choosing where to work.

As an SME business, this shift in thinking will have repercussions on how you attract people into your company. Can you offer fulfilling career opportunities, and can you deliver on being a great place to work?

86%

of workers aged 18-34 are likely to consider company culture in their job search

76%

of workers said they consider company culture to some degree when choosing where to work



Candidates now, are not only cautious but also cynical about company culture, as the pandemic showed us the very best and the very worst of how companies can treat their employees.

However, it's not just the fallout of a pandemic that we have to be mindful of when it comes to candidates' desires.

A younger generation is entering the workforce, alongside the already hyper-vigilant millennials, which means you have to adapt your company culture to meet the needs and wants of a majority workforce. These generations don't just like the idea of good company culture, they see it as an expectation. Our research confirms this mindset, as 86% of workers aged between 18-34 are likely to consider company culture in their job search than any other generation.

As the strongest, most influential demographic of the workforce, culture is a key deciding factor for them in choosing an employer.

As a business, you may not realise that everything you do represents your company culture. Even without consciously deciding on your values, you already have an unconscious culture – because it's in the way you act and behave as a collective. Becoming conscious of the company culture you have right now is the only way to evolve it so that you can begin to attract future employees.

70%

said evidence of a good company culture is important when thinking about looking for another role



5 plays to put into action

It may feel overwhelming to know where to start when it comes to building a company culture to attract the right people into your business, but remember that culture is a journey, it never really ends. It's time to show and tell what your culture looks like.

Use the following plays to take some practical action and kick-start your next recruitment drive with culture at the forefront.

1. Share things about your company culture across your social media channels. And this shouldn't just be those classic fun team building events or national awareness days. Go beyond this, and instead get your team involved with sharing a day in the life of their role, or sharing operational activities such as how you run meetings. People want to see what it's like to work there, not just what fun they can have.

2. You should **have a dedicated web page for your company culture**, sharing everything people would need to know if they were to join your business. You may have an existing careers page, but transform this to focus more on culture and display careers at the bottom of the page. Your culture page should **share your values, behaviours, management style, and any other initiatives that represent you as a company.** Two brands that do this really well are Netflix, and Zappos.

3. Build a culture deck that represents your company culture. This should include things such as holiday allowance, dress code, working hours etc. Don't forget to make this engaging; some companies have created comic books as their culture

decks, or even made videos. The only limit is your imagination, but essentially you want people to engage with this and be so inspired they want a job at your company.

4. Make your existing team part of your recruitment drive by becoming culture ambassadors. It's all too easy for HR managers or business owners to come across as biased during a recruitment push. However, put your existing team front and centre and get them talking about what it's like to work at the company. Many brands have done this, and you can even find their videos on YouTube. Again, Netflix has created an entire series interviewing their team about the company culture, and Sky also did a big recruitment campaign with team members across diverse backgrounds sharing their experiences.

5. Open up your business for culture tours. It might sound like a bold idea, but many companies including SEMCO and Zappos have opened their doors to their customers, the public and potential candidates to show them what goes on behind the scenes. This level of transparency is admirable, and enables people to feel and see your workplace culture.

A portrait of Lizzie Benton, a woman with long brown hair, smiling, wearing a pink floral patterned top. She is positioned in the bottom right corner of the page, partially overlapping the text.

LIZZIE BENTON

Poor job ads are risking your recruitment

Even from that first touch point, candidates could be turning away from your business because of poor job adverts.

We live in a fast-paced, hyper-digital world, where everyone is vying for attention; yet here we are, still creating job adverts that don't deliver an experience, let alone give candidates the information they need.

Many businesses will put their heart and soul into marketing and advertising campaigns, but fall dismally short when it comes to putting out a job advert. They then wonder why they aren't getting many applicants, or why the candidates aren't up to their expectations.

The truth is, the outdated approach many companies are taking to job adverts is putting people off from applying for roles.

Unfortunately, we're still seeing job adverts that act as some kind of cryptic message. There's no salary information, no real tangible details about the job role, and rarely any information about company culture.

When we asked UK workers what would put them off the most when applying for a role, 81% said they would never, or be less likely to apply for a role with unrealistic expectations in the job description, and 77% confirmed that they wouldn't apply if there was no salary listed.

81%

said they would never, or be less likely to apply for a role if it had a job description with unrealistic expectations.

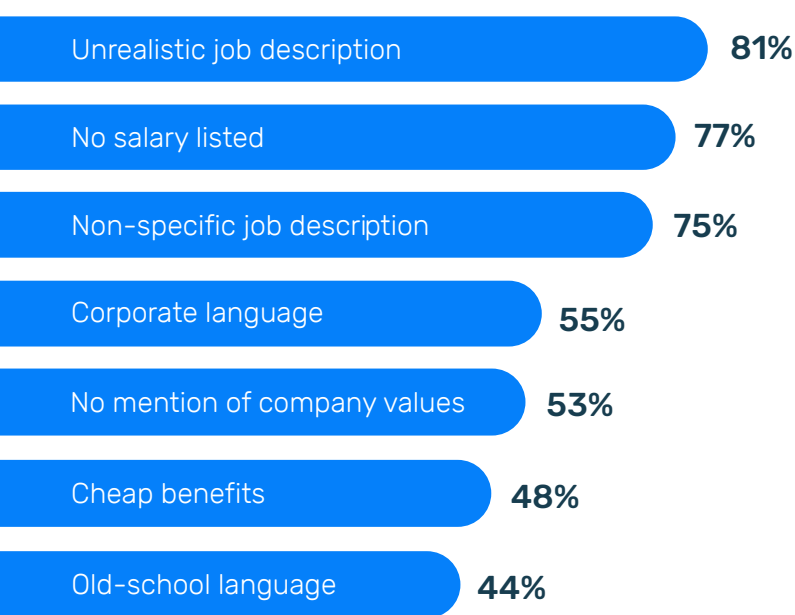




77%

said they would never, or be less likely to, apply for a role if it had no salary listed

Job advert factors that would make workers less likely to apply for a role:



The outdated view point that still remains in job ads is that you can't give too much away. And we say, why not?

The job adverts you put out say so much about your company culture. If you don't talk about salary, this raises a red flag that you either don't pay well, or are afraid to talk about money in your culture - which suggests you don't have pay transparency.

In this type of culture where pay is quiet and kept secret, it only fosters an environment of distrust, competition, and inequality.

Job adverts with unrealistic job descriptions reveal that as a company you're unclear about your vision and mission and that you haven't got a strategic approach to the existing roles and responsibilities you already have in the business. Ultimately, candidates reading this type of job advert will feel like the bar is set so high they will never accomplish anything, and that unrealistic expectations are also part of your wider company culture.

Even down to the way your job adverts are designed are an immediate indication of how you value people and your company culture.

A rushed job advert with bullet points and very little information says that you're just looking for a quick fix to your recruitment needs, and as a candidate they may also see this as just a short-term job, rather than a career.

It's time to stop treating job adverts as a tick-box exercise in the recruitment process, and craft them to be a beacon of your company culture.

5 plays to put into action

Job adverts may feel like one of those monotonous tasks you have to do, but it could be making or breaking your recruitment process. When serious time and money goes into recruitment, it's a significant waste if you decide to just follow the old ways.

Follow these practical ideas to transform your job adverts and begin welcoming people who want to work for your business.

1. Make your job advert a **visual masterpiece that embodies your company culture**. Ditch the bland and boring bullet points, and create something that represents your business, your brand, and your company culture. It should be eye-catching, exciting, and draw people's interest.

2. **List the salary** and don't be shy about it. As we've stated, being closed about the salary is losing you candidates anyway, so post the salary and benefits. If you're worried about existing employees, then this indicates you need to do some work in your company culture around pay transparency. If you're afraid to post about salary because of competitors, remember that while pay is competitive, it's not the only thing that gives you a competitive edge.

3. Consider where you are posting your job adverts. Each platform you post your job advert on also says a lot about you as a business. Easy to post platforms look lazy and often don't allow you to customise your advert. Instead, **think about where your ideal candidates may look for a new role**. As well as your company social media platforms, look at industry specific websites, sector relevant networking

events, and don't forget about local colleges and universities.

4. Within your job advert ensure to **mention your values and behaviours**. These set the expectations for what people will experience when working with you, and what your culture may be like. It's important to **be as honest and transparent as possible** with these, so that these expectations meet reality. Too often it's easy to post aspirational values and behaviours, when these aren't what's actually happening in the day-to-day life of the business.

5. The term 'culture fit' gets used a lot in recruitment, but what you're actually seeking is someone who is going to make a 'culture contribution' to your business. An individual who won't take away from the existing culture, but add to it. This is important to think about when it comes to your job advert. **When you've crafted your job advert get feedback from your team**. Does this sound true to your culture? And with this advert in mind, what kind of person would you attract? These are good questions to help you refine your job advert to help ensure what you've created, attracts the right people.

A portrait of Lizzie Benton, a woman with long brown hair, smiling, wearing a pink floral patterned top. She is positioned in the bottom right corner of the page, with her arms crossed.

LIZZIE BENTON



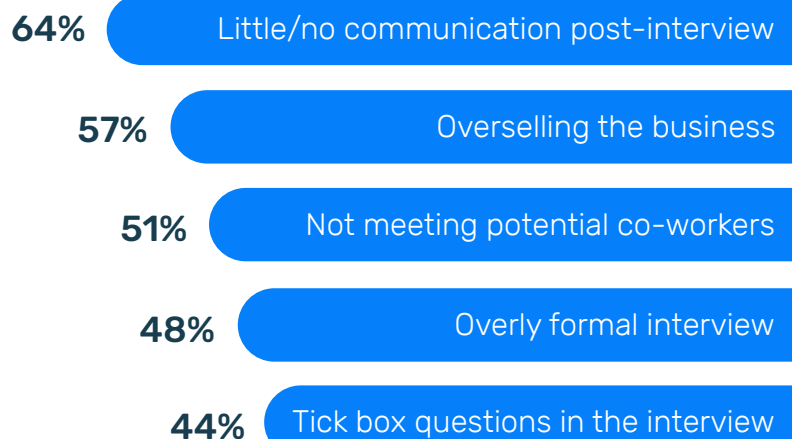
Your culture is in the hot seat when it comes to interviews

It's not just the candidate who's being vetted in the interview process, it's also your business. As candidates are now ever-conscious of the companies they wish to work for, you can fully expect that you'll now be asked questions about your company culture.

From our research, 71% of UK workers said they would ask about company culture in a job interview, along with 18% who would always do this.

From the first encounter between candidate and potential employer, there is now equal footing from both parties as to whether it's a match. Just as you may not choose a candidate, a candidate may not choose you. That is the stark reality of the recruitment landscape we find ourselves in. The question is, are you ready to talk about your company culture?

Interview factors that would make workers less likely to accept a role:



71%

said they would ask about company culture in a job interview



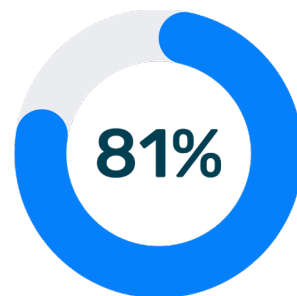
Are you ready to be open about your management style, open about how you deal with conflict, and even more transparent about how you learn from failure?

Once again, our data reveals that the younger workforce are the ones spearheading the culture conversation, as 18-34 years olds are more likely to ask questions about company culture in an interview than older employees.

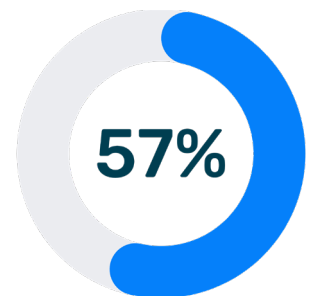
The traditional interview approach is an odd performance. Candidates are trying to look like the best possible version of themselves, and as a business, you're also trying to look like the best employer. Everyone is playing a part. This is why that honeymoon phase quickly fades out after people spend three months in the company. The cracks have shown, the glamour has worn off, and reality has set in.

Questions by candidates on company culture are there to help reveal the truth about what the business is like in the day-to-day, because people don't want to be sold the dream, only to discover it was all a fantasy.

The likelihood of candidates asking about company culture in an interview:



18-34 year-olds



Over 55

As candidates have this cynical curiosity, businesses must be well-prepared to be honest and transparent around what your culture is truly like, and how you continue to nurture it through tough times.

The more realistic your interview process and more aligned to your authentic culture, the better the chance for both parties to create and maintain a lasting relationship – rather than one that's built on false assumptions.

5 plays to put into action

The experience of your interview process will set the scene for candidates about what they can expect from your company culture. It's a moment that both of you will always remember, and a time when you can choose how to begin a working relationship that will hopefully be fruitful.

Ditching the old ways for the new is never easy, especially when the traditional interview blueprint feels so reassuringly safe. However, just because a choice is safe, doesn't mean it's the best one.

Experiment with these five actions and create an interview process that sets the tone for the journey.

1. Get feedback from your existing team about how they found the interview process and ask them how it can be improved. This is a good place to start if you're feeling overwhelmed about restructuring your existing interview style. As they are the people who have experienced it first-hand, they will be able to offer an incredible amount of useful improvements.

2. Allow teams to interview their potential new colleagues rather than just being interviewed by HR or the business owner. You may wish to start the formal interview with a leader, but **ensure that a team member who they will be working closely with is also on the interview.** This also gives everyone a chance to ask questions about the role, and gain another perspective about the culture.

3. Rather than just waiting for culture questions to arise at the end of the interview, make it part of your interview process with a Q&A hot seat. Invite along a manager or leader who the candidate can ask a round of questions to. This is especially powerful if you still have an active founder or business owner in the company.

4. Drop the dress code in favour of a more informal interview. Overly formal dress codes only help to continue that mindset of playing the part, rather than allowing people to feel comfortable and like themselves during the interview.

5. Invite potential candidates along to a culture event at the company. For example, some companies may invite candidates to a team lunch after the interview, or to a team-building activity. Making this part of the interview process broadens their experience of what your culture is like, and gives the rest of the team a chance to know if this is someone they could work well with.



LIZZIE BENTON

| The debrief

People want more from their workplace than just a job and a pay cheque. Thanks to a pandemic, priorities have shifted and now people are searching for careers that don't just provide opportunities, but give them a work-life balance, and a work environment they can enjoy.

As work makes up so much of our lives, why should we be surprised that people are no longer willing to sacrifice their sense of fulfilment and happiness over a job?

In the mindset of current candidates, a job can be found anywhere, but it's a great place to work that's making all the difference.

With this new-found awareness for an employer to have a people-first company culture, businesses are no longer competing over what benefits to offer candidates, or the pay – but what experience they can offer.

Company culture doesn't just start from the moment a person walks through the door, it begins from the first touch-point they have with your business. If you can take this onboard and embrace the fact that culture is now a priority, your journey to finding new recruits will no longer be a burden.





About breathe

Back in 2012, we built our multi-award-winning platform with one thing in mind: to set SMEs free from tedious HR admin so they can **focus on their people**, develop their **company culture** & drive **productivity**.

Our simple & cost-effective software makes it super-easy to manage employee data, leave, sickness, HR-documents, training & performance, expenses, recruitment, rotas, timesheets & more.

The result? Small businesses can finally leave time-consuming tasks behind for good – without breaking the bank.

Breathe is 100% cloud-based, GDPR-compliant & ISO27001-accredited, with over 10,000 organisations already trusting our software to keep their data water-tight. Breathe is part of the ELMO group.

[Start your FREE 14-day trial](#)

About Lizzie Benton, Company Culture Coach & Founder of



Lizzie Benton is a culture specialist who supports organisations and businesses in developing a purpose-driven company culture and more autonomous teams. Lizzie has been recognised as one of the **top 30 millennials changing the world of work** and has been featured in The Metro, HuffingtonPost, Forbes and the Financial Times. Lizzie is best known for her honest approach to company culture and believes in building more organisations that support our human potential.

Lizzie's skills and training is based in new ways of working and self-managed organisations. She has trained in the Netherlands and with a leading Swedish organisation to learn from those who are leading the movement in company culture. Lizzie is a Holacracy Practitioner, TuffLeadership Practitioner, SEMCO Certified Expert and ambassador for Teal organisations.

[Learn more](#)

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- **on us.**

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