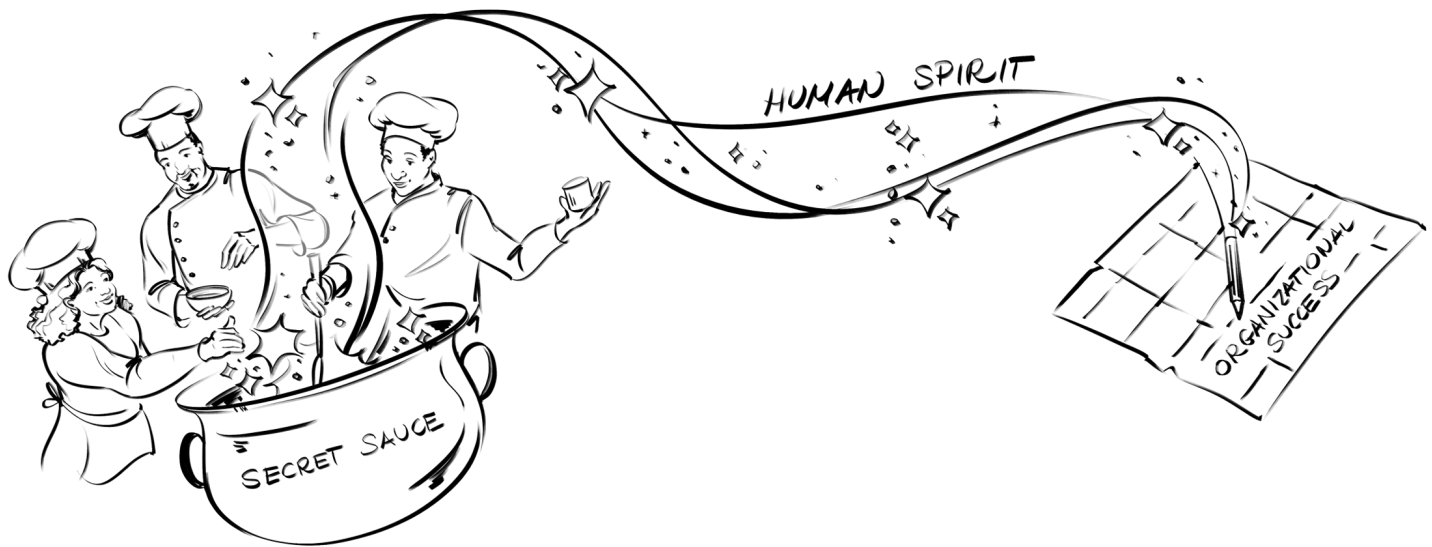


Insights on the Secret Sauce: The Power of the Human Spirit!



What makes Root... Root? Is there a secret sauce, and is it transferable to any organization? As we approach the fourth year of being Root, a part of Accenture, the time will one day come when we will just be Accenture. So, after 38 years at Root, a simple question popped into my mind that I wanted to ask a few others: what did they think made Root... Root?

Some people spoke about the human moments that generated amazing energy that served as the lifeblood of the organization, influencing its overall climate and success. Others spoke about a positive spirit that is contagious, fueling enthusiasm, a growth mindset, and a willingness to risk and stretch while sparking innovation and fostering engagement. The way they described what they thought was special had a feeling of being intensely spiritual. It helped me better appreciate the power of the “human spirit” and what it means to our people. Here is what really stands out for me from what I heard – and what I feel could be adopted to unleash the human spirit in any organization.

1. We don’t do business, we do life. Human connections are the foundation. Don’t ever accept that it’s “just business.” The genuine care for others is present in all we do. We carve out time for fellow “Rootsters” (what we call our people), whether it’s during the first five minutes of a Teams call or during a happy hour on a work trip. We never take each other for granted. We call out our admirations for each other, and we aren’t shy to suggest where we need to elevate, collectively and individually. We celebrate the good things that happen in each other’s lives and show up to support each other when life gets tough. This translates to clients, too. And here’s a key that is so simple, but so vital: we see people as human first. We ask about their families, their passions, and what they want to create. We celebrate their wins and help them navigate their failures. We don’t do business, we do life! The mindset of it being “a privilege to serve” permeates everything we do.



2. We embrace the power of vulnerability.

Leaders who are vulnerable, relatable, and can laugh at themselves (while encouraging others to do the same) open the door for widespread authenticity. The power of not taking yourself too seriously is amazingly impactful. It can also be powerful to limit or eliminate hierarchy and distance between people, admit that you don't have all the answers, allow humans to come as they are, and be fearless in saying exactly what you think and feel. This creates a sense of psychological safety that is further enhanced when leaders acknowledge that they need help or have made a mistake. It all allows everyone to relate to their leaders, and it stressed that it's OK and encouraged to just be you. This includes relentless transparency. The boldest thing leaders can do to create an environment of truth and trust is to be publicly vulnerable.



3. We celebrate the person, not the job.

It's so easy – too easy – to see people at work as the job they do or the role they play, instead of looking at who they really are. One sad quote by Edwin James said, "Born a man, died a grocer." It's so common to pigeonhole a person based on the work they do (such as a proofreader, or consultant, or programmer). We are constantly reminded that each of us is a human being with amazing skills, and with a family, passions, loves, and dreams. Knowing this about each person creates a much broader perspective of the power of an individual. At Root, we've created visual caricatures of all our people that capture all of these unique aspects about them, such as their leadership in rescuing animals, or their participation in barbershop quartet, or their commitment to Girls on the Run. This instantly creates a context to see each person differently. In the



words of our people, "On the surface, one might argue that this perspective could make work secondary to humanity and, thus, suffer. But the opposite is true. The humanity comes first because you see your fellow colleagues as people, and you tend to not want to let them down." By the way, this is the most common trait of championship teams. Actually, what happens is that work thrives. Results become extraordinary. During March Madness, I heard an interview with someone who had spent a lot of time with legendary basketball coach John Wooden, and they quoted Wooden as saying, "Develop the person first, develop the player second, and the rest will take care of itself!" Wow, so very true!

4. We see humor as a multiplier of human spirit.

People find things funny because they can relate to them. Think about it – most funny things have some element of relevance and truth to them, especially when it comes to slightly embarrassing truths about leaders or behaviors in an organization. The key is that, as an organization, we are not afraid to encourage folks to "let their hair down" and be willing to laugh at themselves. This creates psychological safety for everyone to do the same and engage in all truths. Humorous sketches about the issues that people, teams, and organizations don't know how to talk about have been a mainstay of Root engagements for the last 25 years. Humor creates a chuckle and a fully human realization that we are all co-authors of situations and conditions that we all often whine about. We find it easy to take the bitter route to adversity, tension, and conflict, where it's easy to blame others. However, humor loosens each of us to the reality that getting better requires us to take accountability for how we each contribute to the areas we most complain about. Humor is an amazing springboard to critical and crucial conversations we need to excel as humans working together.



5. We are serious about the power of play. Integrating play into our culture has been vital for fostering creativity, innovation, and human connection. Research shows that playful environments encourage free-flowing ideas and positive work atmospheres, leading to growth and high performance. In a Harvard Business Review article, Duncan Wardle wrote, “I asked people to close their eyes and recall where they were when they had their best ideas. Over 80% of participants said they were in the shower, in bed, jogging, or playing with their children - anywhere but work. Out of 15,000 people, not a single person said they get their best ideas on the job. This isn’t a coincidence; it’s a symptom of how traditional work environments stifle creative thinking.” As a creative organization, we embrace the research that fun at work correlates with new, original ideas and a positive work environment. Fun and play are anything but trivial, trite, or non-strategic. They are traits for high performance driven by nurturing the very best of human innovation and imagination.



6. We understand the role of relentless curiosity. The relentless curiosity that stems from our humility is identified in our interview process, and it is upheld because of the way we do our work, which is highly iterative with collaboration, dialogue intensity, and inclusivity, from the C-suite to the front line. The way we approach client problems is by dialoging and discovering ourselves and iterating solutions across teams. Also, I am not my idea. Combining your idea and my idea is where the magic is - what we believe as human beings is that we are better off together than apart in our constant pursuit to find better ways to live together.



7. We deeply believe in the power and potential of each other. Dialogue is the oxygen of change. But true dialogue requires listening to understand versus listening to respond. To the people involved, this can feel like all of the following statements: “I feel seen,” “I feel an appreciation to be here,” “I feel people want to listen to me,” “I feel valued,” and “I feel that my involvement matters.” Dialogue is, in its essence, the art of thinking together.



Unleashing the human spirit is, in the end, a lot about people and recognizing the vital role people play in any business success. Follow the advice of John Wooden: “Develop the person first, the player second, and the rest will take care of itself.” These are wise words from the legendary UCLA basketball coach who won 10 NCAA national championships between 1964 and 1975, and the only coach to lead a team to seven consecutive NCAA championships.

As chairman and co-founder of Root, Jim Haudan has spent over 30 years helping the world’s most influential organizations transform their businesses, change how they engage their people, and deliver exceptional results. He has helped over 150 Global 2000 companies navigate these transformations.

Jim captures Root’s story in his bestselling book, *The Art of Engagement: Bridging the Gap Between People and Possibilities*. His latest book, *What Are Your Blind Spots? Conquering the 5 Misconceptions That Hold Leaders Back* – co-authored by Root CEO Rich Berens – dives into effective ways to motivate employees at every level of the organization. Jim has delivered speeches on these topics and more at TEDx BGSU, Tampa TEDx, and Conference Board events, and has given keynote speeches for many organizations around the world.

Jim lives in Sylvania, Ohio, with his wife, Michelle. They have three children and six grandchildren.

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