

# How Putting People First Brings Success

Team members have unique strengths that add to the exponential value of an organization. What strategies can leaders implement to allow for better collaboration? Today, Jaime talks with John Fairclough about how 'putting people first' brings success.

## About the Host

Welcome to Culture Eats Strategy with your host, entrepreneur Jaime Jay. On this podcast, we unpack the most powerful intangible, culture. Culture is way more than a mission statement or words on a wall, it's how a company behaves. It's what informs every decision, action, and reaction. Culture is the invisible hands, the True North that guides every organization, and if you create a legendary culture, you will build a legendary company.

Link to the podcast:

<https://culture.bottleneck.online/how-putting-people-first-brings-success-john-fairclough/>



## John Fairclough on How Putting People First Brings Success

**Intro:** *Welcome to Culture Eats Strategy with your host, entrepreneur Jaime Jay. On this podcast, we unpack the most powerful intangible, culture. Culture is way more than a mission statement or words on a wall, it's how a company behaves. It's what informs every decision, action, and reaction. Culture is the invisible hands, the True North that guides every organization, and if you create a legendary culture, you will build a legendary company. Now, here he is, Jamie Jay.*

**Jaime:** *Hey there, it's Jamie Jay with Culture Eats Strategy. Thanks for tuning in again. If you've heard the past couple episodes, and they're really resonating with you, please go to iTunes and give us a rating and a review. If it's not five stars, it's four stars, or three stars, by all means I invite you to leave an honest review and rating of the show. Really appreciate it, because that let's me know where I need to improve, and if you hear any of our guest that resonate with you, please let me know. I want to hear from you, and I want to let them know that you are just digging the information that we're going over. And today, as you know, we have John Fairclough, and he founded The Resicom Group to help retailers optimize the way they improve and maintain their store environment.*

*And under his leadership, the company has evolved from a local construction company into an international provider of facility management and construction services. And naturally curious, Jon spends his time developing better questions to find the uncommon sense of a situation, and I love that. You know I love this, he even goes on to say that by improving his question, he's been able to create better answers to the challenges to developing people, evolving their processes and protecting the value delivered. I think this is amazing, because Jon's specialties include listening without prejudice, activating ideas, and mentoring without bias. So he's on a mission to help businesses protect their brands at all touch points throughout their physical facilities. Without any further ado, please allow me to introduce you to John Fairclough. How are you, sir?*

**John:** I'm great, how are you?

**Jaime:** *I'm super pumped to talk to you. I know we just finished a little bit of a, in our pre-interview there learning a little bit more about you and about what you have going on, and you are just enjoying life and killing it. And I apologize, I know you are a little bit under the weather, but thank you for being at trooper and still showing up. I wonder if maybe you could tell us a little bit more about you.*

**John:** Oh sure, I'm a dad of four. I spend a lot of time trying to frustrate and aggravate the for my own sanity's sake. If anybody has children out there, I think they know what I mean. I really center my life on my faith, and I really enjoy the intensity of difficult work. I love it. The bigger the challenge, the more engaged I get, and I like accomplishing things with people. So, it's really cool to take something on and let the strengths of other people shine through in whatever we put forth, and I certainly like it when my strengths shine, and I like it when other people's do as well. And it's a lot of fun doing great work, that's for sure.

**Jaime:** *Oh my gosh, I think it's in the nature of the entrepreneur to love extremely challenging times or circumstance. Twenty years ago you founded the Resicom Group, how did that come to be?*



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- John:** Well, I used to work for a couple of different family members that owned different types of painting companies or so were painting companies, and maybe another trade or two, drywall, and stuff like that. And I worked for them for a while, and I worked with one uncle very closely, and he really gave me my shot, and I grew his company. I learned a lot from him, and we just got to a point where it was better for me to leave, for him and for myself, and I went on my own. Don't know what was going to happen, but I was all in, and never looked back. Super appreciative of what he did for me, and super grateful for what I've been blessed with.
- Jaime:** *Awe, fantastic, well congratulations for taking the step out there. It's now 20 years later, what do you see different now than when you first started?*
- John:** Wow, so many different things, and then somethings just really stayed the same. My big challenge back then was finding a way for me to matter, and to be relevant, and as crazy as it sounds I grew up really super poor. We got our food from food pantries. We didn't have any electricity, which means no refrigerator. And you kind of followed all the way through, no telephone, no car, and my mom just struggled raising us. And so, there was a lot of resilience that kind of grew out of this adversity, but there was this missing piece that was like, hey, you really matter. What you think and how you feel, that part of it, really wasn't super present because we were just scraping by just to eat and just to survive. So, kind of going through that, that was great preparation for entrepreneurship.
- John:** So, I've always looked at people a certain way and wanted to see the good in them and that, because I didn't really have that. I didn't have... No one wanted to hear what the poorest kid in the school said. My siblings and I, we were the poorest kids in the school in a very poor area. No one really cares about what they have to say. We went to school, we probably smelled bad, you know, we just didn't have... My mom couldn't even or anything, so there was this part that, hey, people matter and there are circumstances might mask their value. And that's what happened to us, and so... As it sits now, all of my siblings are successful, they're leading great lives and have happy lives, and just great marriages, great kids. A lot of, so many good things came out of it. So, that difficult time and having that really stayed with me, that people of value is often masked by things that really don't matter. So, that stayed with me.
- John:** The big change for me is to recognize what my God-given strengths are, and how those really... People aim to handicap it, and I never really understood it, because people say I'm a bear, and I don't like being compared to a beast. But I'm a bear, and so then okay, well now I'm going to be a little nicer. Like I started working in a way where people couldn't say that I was a bear, but I am a bear. I take on the difficult challenges, and I want to crush them. And I don't want to let, you know, I don't want to let my teeth out of them once I'm in them. And I think the world needs that kind of person, and when I'm handcuffed... I always say if people want to fight in a passive aggressive way that's no good for me. But when they really want to go at it, well then they're finally playing my game. We're finally able to... I'm able to be me. Let's, we don't have to dance around it.
- John:** So, I would say that part, letting my... Of understanding what my strengths are, and letting them show even if it's a little controversial. That has been a big lesson, and the most important one I believe in terms of management has been to only manage people, or if I'm going to hire them to work with me, only manage people that I really care about.



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**Jaime:** *Mm-hmm (affirmative).*

**John:** And if I don't care about them, I've disqualified myself from being their manager. Like, I can't manage someone I don't like, because managing them requires me to move all in, like to really accompany them. And much like my child, my child would be super unhappy or like a disaster if she didn't believe that I saw the good in her, or she didn't believe that I wanted her to get better, or she didn't believe that I was there cheering her on to get better. Well, translate that over to work, it's the same thing, and if the manager doesn't have that kind of approach to their people, well there's so much discouragement that comes from it. So for me, a huge lesson has been: Do not hire anybody you do not want to manage. You're not going to move all in to help and just kind of a piece for you there.

**Jaime:** *I love that. I think, what is that? Slow to hire, quick to fire-type thing. This is a great transition into company culture or I should stress good company culture or a kind company culture. I think you can be a bear and really sink your teeth into stuff, but I think you can still be a good leader and people respect you, because one of the things I think that you're a big believer in is listening. As you said here, your specialty includes listening without prejudice, activating ideas, and mentoring without bias. I love that.*

**John:** For sure. Thank you.

**Jaime:** *What-*

**John:** Thank you for sure. I mean, we want to take on the challenges. We want to take on the challenges, but if we get too caught up with the politics of it, nothing's going to happen, right?

**Jaime:** *Exactly.*

**John:** So when we give each other... The same way people want me to give them enough space to allow them to succeed and give them grace, give them space and grace, I can expect space and grace too. Like let me do what I need to do, and I think that's the part of it where I see a lot of people get lost in the culture world about things that look politically correct versus things that look politically incorrect, and the ones that are politically incorrect are put into this category of being bad when really they're only politically incorrect, they're not incorrect. It's just that narrow piece of it in allowing someone to be the person that they are, and you know that's sometimes just the way that it is. But it takes different types of strengths to get through different times. We need someone that's strong to fight off the intruder, but we need someone that's soft to nurture someone. But if you're looking for me to be the nurturer, we've got roles mixed up here. I'm not that warm and fuzzy teddy bear.

**Jaime:** *Well, I really... That's something I can completely get on board with. So, when I'm growing my company, I look for people that are strong in certain areas that I'm weak, and like you said, you were searching for your importance, your place in life when you were younger, and I'd love to ask another question about that, hopefully I remember. But when you were talking about that, I was kind of thinking the same thing. It was hard for me to admit that hey, that wasn't a good strong suit of mine, in particular details, terrible at details, but had to go out and find somebody who was really good at details, and also find somebody at the same time that bought into our culture, right. There's a certain way that I wanted to run this company, and I know I can always have someone else that's going to be better in certain things and be able to improve it. But I wanted them to, like you said, I wanted to like them, right.*



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**Jaime:** *And I wonder, what is it you look for when you're growing your team, when you're growing your company? Perhaps even with the private equity, what do you look for to make sure that it's someone that you're going to like to work with?*

**John:** Well, I believe that, if we look at the human body, we've got all these different parts, right, and your pinky toenail is nothing like your knee. So there's got to be some diversity as to what makes up the whole, but the things that I believe are core really come down to our core values, and if those things are present then the nuances are fine. Because we're looking for diversity. We have some clients that are super analytical, and then we have other clients that are just super let's say extroverts. Well those extroverts do not want to hang out with the analytical person, so it's not like, oh well this person is... This person's full of energy and life, and they're a great sales person.

Yeah, they're a great salesperson for someone who likes to interact with that kind of person, but not for the guy who's super analytically driven like a lot of procurement professions. And if those are who's ultimately buying our services, maybe we don't pair them up with the guy that really is the life of the party. So, I believe that diversity is there, but it all comes down to if they have our core values, where if they get it they want it, and they have the capacity for it then I'm all in. They're the right kind of person for us.

**Jaime:** *Yeah, that's fantastic. So, over the... About how big is your team there?*

**John:** So, we have a bunch of companies, but the one that does the most work we have maybe say 50 people that are managing projects that are getting done by hundreds of technicians, so we have a bunch of project managers that are managing... Each of them is managing a bunch of crews that are doing things. So, our project management and management team is like 50 and then the technicians that are doing the work in the field are hundreds.

**Jaime:** *So, one of your... Thank you for sharing that. One of your challenges is developing people and evolving their processes. How do you manage an organization that large? 'Cause processes need to consistently be updated, right?*

**John:** Sure.

**Jaime:** *How do you manage it?*

**John:** Yeah, I think there's that whole part of looking at the work through the lens of the buyer, and so by completely regular reviews of the account. So, we're looking for anything... So, we want to take a look at what are the trends? What are we getting more of? What are we getting less of? How are our scores trending? Where are things? We like to have this sort of data because then we look at the data and say, okay, what is the data telling us? And then how do we respond to that? And so, we have basically like a monthly review of an account, but the whole purpose of the review is not the report, but rather what are we conveying to the team? And what's the message that we're conveying to the client? And in this regular feedback platform with the client and with our internal team, we're able to learn a lot, and that's how we start to gain these insights. It would be kind of cool if you could instead of updating each, we have... Every month we do like 3,000 projects, okay, so—



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**John:** Sometimes there's a block of 100 projects that are all kind of related that are all part of... There's a larger project that's 100 smaller projects within it. Well, when that's the case, working with one of our clients, we said, hey, what if we gave you an update instead of on each project the way that you have it, what if we just put it all in an online spreadsheet of sorts, and we color code it to anything that's red you need to look at right away. Anything that's yellow, there's information that you should know on there, but it's not drastic, and anything that's green, everything's on track, and then allows you to sort it accordingly.

And then that way if you only have a limited amount of time, you can go through the most pressing things first, and then the informative things next, and then anything you want to know about the good projects, you're able to dive in. And they loved it. So we did this 10 years ago, and that's evolved into being a great tool for us to update in bulk to a client even if they have a software system that organizes everything for them, having this quick visible piece on it has helped them.

**Jaime:** *Oh, that's fantastic.*

**John:** It's great.

**Jaime:** *That's fantastic. Yeah, I mean, I love systems and processes and workflows. I kind of geek out on that stuff, and I have this mantra, do something like it's the last time I'm ever going to do it, so I always write down things, at least that's how I started. But with you at a more graduated place and point in time in your business, I could just see, oh my gosh, what an incredible feat that is, incredible accomplishment. So, hat's off to you. There for 20 years, you don't hear that too often.*

**John:** Thank you.

**Jaime:** *What do you mean by listening without prejudice and activating ideas?*

**John:** Well, a lot of times when... There's an important distinction for me for people, and when they're giving the information, and I like the facts kept separate from someone's opinion, and if we listened to people speak to us, a lot of times they're a blend, and they take the facts that support their opinion, and they just kind of give you that part of it. And so, I like to know what's the situation, and then I like to know what do you think we should do about it? Rather than having those combined, and so listening without prejudice, where we're going with that is, or with that you can kind of look at both of those two things together when it's prejudice and bias.

We're looking at, like is my mind open enough to find the best solution here, or am I advocating for a certain solution? So, there's just that little pause that says, okay, what is the best thing for us to do here? It's just a pause. What's the best thing for us to do here, and why? And then kind of going through something rather than saying, hey I think we should spend more money in this area, now the person comes with a [inaudible 00:19:51] area. Hey, let's go ahead and spend that, because I think it's going to be good for us. Well, why? I mean I know you like that idea, but what is it compete with? And then how did it win in its competition? And what I've found is that a lot of times people get into a groove, a rhythm, and they make decision fast, and when they make decisions fast they haven't stopped to think about them.



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**John:** So, we like people to be in the habit of making good decisions, so we want to build that habit that says, hey, let's examine that, and then make a case for it. Not like, hey, your job's on the line and you're going to need to answer for it, and it's especially not CYA, which I think is the most destructive thing in business.

**Jaime:** *Oh yeah.*

**John:** Because it's not looking out for the interests of the overall group, it's looking out for the interests of a person. See I say, my value to Resicom is my value of Resicom, and since I hold it in such high regard, I'm going to make decisions that make it obvious that I care about the company. Well, if I operated in a way that covered my behind and exposing the company, I would forfeit the right to be in charge of this company, because I'm not putting the company first. It doesn't have the level of priority that it needs. So, when people are making decisions, a lot of times they're gonna go into something that's just going to be knee-jerk, and we want that knee-jerk to be one that's sound, where hey, I've removed myself, what I'm thinking about it, or what I wanted before the discussion began. I'm listening to learn, and then it's going to affirm what I was thinking already or maybe it's going to modify it. But there's no chance for modification when I'm advocating, so I've gotta keep my mind open on that.

**Jaime:** *That's fantastic, I love that. Yeah, so how about activating ideas?*

**John:** Well, so once something is solved. Like hey, this is a great thing for us to do, the next piece is to really figure out how do we get people motivated to make the change. And just we like habits, because we're comfortable in habits. We know what the outcome's gonna be, even if it's a bad situation. Studies have shown this for years that people stay in a bad situation, but there's differences in opinion on why, but it really comes down to the people know that they can survive it, right.

**Jaime:** *Right.*

**John:** Well, how do we get them motivated to make the change? So, we get them to start thinking about that, getting excited about what that's going to do for everyone, for the person individually or for the team if they're responsible for a group. You know, making it personal for them, and then removing the obstacles, right, because there's all kinds of things in the way. One of the biggest things in the way of improvement is success, and how do you go to something that's successful and then say we're going to change it? Or don't change what's not broken.

**Jaime:** *Right.*

**John:** You kind of get into this, you know, it doesn't sound very pragmatic, and that's where I get into that politically correct. It doesn't pragmatic, so someone can make a case that you're a dummy for doing it, and now I'm afraid of people thinking that I'm a dummy, so now I'm not going to make the change because I can't be criticized, and now I'm safe, but I'm left with a company with a weaker process than possible, simply because my fear of being ridiculed by someone. Out comes the bear, ready to pounce on that mediocrity, and say no, this is what's going to happen here.



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**Jaime:** *Well, that's one of the biggest challenge... I left corporate American for I believe that very reason. I felt uncomfortable voicing my opinion. I felt like I would be ridiculed. I just didn't, and it was just not a good environment for me. I'm not saying corporate America is a bad place, I'm not saying that, for me it didn't work, and I think that was a big reason. And I think that's why this particular company saw such huge turnover.*

**John:** Sure.

**Jaime:** *It was scary to come up with an idea, and no one asked questions.*

**John:** A bad manager is so destructive, right, I mean, it's so destructive.

**Jaime:** *Oh, it was terrible, but I think too if you go back to your childhood and wanting to be taken seriously. A lot of people could have easily have gone in another direction than what you chose to do and could have been that bad manager, so for you to come with that kind of background as a child to where you are now, even though you are a bear, when things need to happen, you're there. It's really respectable to not only, number one, hear the way that you talk about your passion. Obviously you're passionate about what you're doing, but I mean you're a smart fella. I mean, you get it, otherwise the company wouldn't be where it's at today.*

**John:** Well, thank you.

**Jaime:** *It's great, it's great. How do... Before we wrap up here, how do people learn more about you and I want to dive into a little bit about what you're doing that's kind of neat, the private equity end of things, but how do people get in touch with you or learn more about you?*

**John:** Sure, the best way is to email me at [john@johnfairclough.com](mailto:john@johnfairclough.com), and just start a conversation with me. I'm on LinkedIn if someone wants to connect with me there. I'm in the Chicago area, so there's a handful of other John Fairclough's out there but none in Chicago, and none that look like a bear either. So yeah, just reach out and start a conversation. We're looking to invest money in small companies that are looking to grow, but if some sort of a stumbling block, whether they don't have the capital or they know they should be accomplishing a whole lot more, but just haven't been able to figure out the code, we'd love a crack at it and kind of take a look at it and see if it was something that we would be interested in getting involved in, and helping that business and that person do really, really well.

**Jaime:** *Fantastic, 'cause you use a lot of your same principles for what you've used in these various other entities that you've grown and is there any kind of limitations? Are you looking... Is it regional companies that you're looking kind of close to where you're at? Or is there any type of industry in particular that you're looking to entertain?*

**John:** Sure, great point. So, we like businesses that are close to us, that are whatever, any industry that's kind of close to us, we're open to take a look at it. We have a large leadership team that's got a lot of experience in a bunch of different areas, so we're pretty diverse there. As far as... But kind of close by so we can keep our eyes on and really help, be there to accompany that business in its growth. If it's in the facilities world where Resicom is, that company can be based anywhere. We know that business. We know how to manage from afar. We have offices in different cities across the US. We've had offices in Canada, so we know how to manage that remote and grow that remotely, so we're interested in facilities companies anywhere, and then other businesses in the Chicago market would be great, maybe if that's where they're based out of.





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**Jaime:** *Perfect, and somebody, the perfect person that came to you right now, and they said, "Hey, I would love to learn a little bit more about your private equity group, this is what I do." Where would they be in their journey, business journey?*

**John:** So, they could be, say, anywhere under 50 employees, but more than a couple of employees. Like say at least three employees and up to like 50, just for the amount of capital. When the companies are over 50, and they need capital, they usually need a ton of capital, and we're not in a position to invest millions and millions of dollars in anybody at this point. We like the smaller deals, help them grow, get them to where they need to be. So, anywhere from a handful to say 50 employees, and then I would say where they have somethings are really strong. Like we're not looking to catch any falling knives, we're looking for areas that are really strong.

The person might be great in that subject matter, but they don't have the strength across the board in maybe accounting. Maybe they don't have the capital or the credit to seize opportunities, or they don't really know who their best customers are or how to target that market. We're able to help them by bringing that expertise to the table, in addition to the capital and help the business grow, and I think if you look at that involvement, that accompaniment, that's why we're looking for companies that are in or around Chicago, because that takes some face-to-face interactions.

**Jaime:** *Yeah, yeah. Well, that's fantastic. Well, John, thank you so much for taking the time even though you're feeling a little bit under the weather. I really appreciate it. Your insight has been unbelievable, so thank you so much for sharing that and your story.*

**John:** This has been a lot of fun. I really appreciate it, and this was great. If you ever want me back, consider me in.

**Jaime:** *Heck yeah, done deal!*

**John:** For sure.

**Jaime:** *Anything else you'd like to say before we wrap?*

**John:** Just thank you. It really is a privilege to be here, thank you.

**Jaime:** *Thank you so much, John. Hold on the line just one second, I'll go ahead and wrap up. You've been listening to my conversation today with John Fairclough from the Resicom Group, and you can learn more by going to [Resicomonline.com/about](http://Resicomonline.com/about). And you can also if you want to get in touch with John, you can go to [john@johnfairclough.com](mailto:john@johnfairclough.com), and that's F-A-I-R-C-L-O-U-G-H dot com. We'll also put it in the show notes there, and I hope you really enjoyed this. This is one of those episodes where I might recommend listening through, and then going back and re-listen to it, because there's a lot of golden gems in there and I don't want you to miss out on them. This is a great conversation, so I cannot thank John enough for taking his time today. My name's Jaime Jay, host of Culture Eats Strategy, where we do lead with kindness and we lead well. So thank you so much for tuning in, have a great day and we'll talk to you soon.*

