

Setting trends and attracting the right talent

By [Gareth Hawkey](#)

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At redPanda Software, we strive to recreate the spirit of Silicon Valley. While many South African businesses might balk at the idea of unlimited vacation days or even a full year of paid maternity or paternity leave, it is evident by the successes of Silicon Valley that there are merits in rethinking what a work environment for the new generation could be.



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But to simply try and recreate Silicon Valley in other parts of the world would not work. Instead, one needs to take into consideration the ethos of what that environment has created and emulate that within the South African corporate culture.

In the ICT sector specifically, I believe this is especially challenging as employees want to work at companies that are unique in their approaches to problems. They see and hear what is happening in Silicon Valley and want to go there and experience it for themselves.

Although Silicon Valley promotes this fun work environment, a well thought out, unifying strategy is needed in order to build strong employees and in turn, a strong employer brand. Employers need to plan this out to ensure that employees not only have time in their daily lives to participate in the fun around the office, but also see it as a reward for their hard

work within their respective development teams.

Talent and staff retention



Building good ICT solutions requires good people. The environment created needs to be filled with employees who share the same ethos as the company. A way to attract those talented individuals is to offer them support from a management perspective in order for them to grow their career.

For example, developers want the opportunity to progress within an organisation and be exposed to as many different things as possible. They, like so many others, are hard-working individuals that want to be fulfilled, become successful and feel that they are a part of a bigger picture. One of the biggest lessons to take from Silicon Valley, is in how companies there

are able to nurture both the professional and personal sides of each person, ensuring sustainable and balanced growth of the individual.

To this end, it is important to have a creative environment where people can do something besides work. For example, at redPanda Software, we have a 'Right Stuff room' where employees can participate in art classes or learn to play musical instruments. We carefully thought out these activities to ensure that they are beneficial to our employees who can broaden their knowledge and mastery; and is encouraged and entwined in the company culture.



Businesses must realise that providing employees with an avenue to be creative and viewing them as complete individuals will filter through to their professional lives. It is all about giving people opportunities to grow as individuals within the business. For this to happen, management needs to work much closer with people than what it is perhaps used to.

Passionate people

Cutting-edge software development can only happen because everybody is excited. Similarly, any other job needs people to come together and work in a place that is not your typical, grey corporate environment.

If there is one thing to be gleaned from Silicon Valley, it is that people are passionate not only in their skills, but in their attitudes as well. We aim to be an employer of choice for software developers in South Africa, and have instituted a number of initiatives for employees to be mentored into management roles, but we equally pay attention to those who choose to pursue a technical career.

By providing ample opportunities for employees to grow and explore different roles within the company - and to move towards more senior, management positions - we have been able to nurture its staff contingent from within and retain top talent.



redPanda Software offices.

Ultimately, it is about creating a second home for people. You want to have your employees care about you and grow with your business. And that is one of the best lessons that South African companies can learn from Silicon Valley... sure, the technology is great, but it cannot be created without passionate people.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gareth Hawkey is CEO of www.redpandasoftware.co.za (redPanda Software). Hawkey has 22 years of experience within the IT industry and holds an MBA from the University of Cape Town which he completed in 2008. He has a passion for business, and began his first business at the age of 16. He was a co-founder of redPanda Software in 2009.

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