

Good company
culture is not about
silly, attention-
grabbing perks



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Just because you offer an eye-grabbing perk doesn't mean you can brag about your company's . There's a lot of attention over startup Boxed Wholesale deciding to offer an innovative employee benefit: for its employees, up to \$20, 000. Boxed CEO Cheih Huang told Quartz he but decided to invest in benefits instead. (A Boxed spokesperson that raises still happen, based on performance reviews.)The wedding payment plan yielded a slew of positive press, and Boxed Wholesale — whose only other spate of positive attention came from offering another benefit: Cheih's paying, from his own pocket, of college tuition — is quickly becoming one of those companies, like Zappos, that pundits and journalists point to when they want to show the pinnacle of great corporate culture.

In reality, though, Boxed () is one of those companies that misses the point of what good culture is. In fact (again, also like Zappos) Boxed Wholesale's latest perk can just as easily be viewed as a discriminatory and shallow publicity stunt that masks what could later be deeper problems in the organization. Related: Having a great company culture takes hard work, and, while it requires an intention on the part of business leaders to create a solid culture, it also takes acceptance and adoption on the part of the rank and file. That's why perks are so often a red herring: A company with a ping-pong table, ice cream socials and all-expenses-paid Grubhub accounts can have lousy culture. When *Entrepreneur* and CultureIQ set out to rank the companies with the best company culture, , including collaboration, communication and values.

" Perks and benefits" wasn't a criterion. The trouble with the focus on culture nowadays it that it too often becomes limiting rather than freeing. At its <https://assignbuster.com/good-company-culture-is-not-about-silly-attention-grabbing-perks/>

worst, some culture programs are , with their focus on " fit," a code word at startups that usually requires you act and think exactly like the founding team. A wedding benefit is, by its very nature, exclusionary.

It only applies to people getting married. If you're already married, the company isn't going to reimburse you the cost of your celebrant and hall. If you choose to stay single, you don't get a check. While the company says no one has complained yet, this is a benefit that by its nature segregates its employees. Truth is, so did the last big benefit Boxed touted, where employees' tuition was paid. Look at it this way: You get extra money from your employer if you get married and send your kids to college.

I'm not one of those liberal whiners who believes that is somehow objectionable, nor am I as quick to find offense as everyone else seems to be these days. But, based on the benefits being offered employees, you get a sense of what kind of employee Boxed is looking for here. Better put, if I were a trial lawyer, I could at least make a pretty good case around what kind of employee Boxed is looking for here. What's more, it's a silly benefit to offer.

A wedding is indeed expensive. If I were a Boxed employee, the company would probably have to raise a separate venture round just to pay for the three I've had. But, while pricey, a wedding isn't a hardship. In announcing the new benefit, Cheih Huang was quoted as saying, " We just felt like once someone is part of the Boxed family, we want to be there for them in their time of need.

" Time of need? Yes, sometimes life throws you curveballs — the company says it instituted a benefit because an employee's wedding fund was depleted caring for a sick family member — but a wedding is a simple contract between two people in love. A justice of the peace doesn't cost much. The reasons weddings are so important is that we tend to over-do them: china patterns, flowers, passed hors d'oeuvres, a five-tier cake. There's an industry behind weddings that wraps itself in the cloke of love and good feelings, but really should be wearing a ski mask as it relieves you of your wallet. Related: A wedding is in no way a " time of need." Watching a loved one struggle through cancer, having a sick child, fighting a foreclosure — those are times of need.

Those are especially tough to handle, when, like an employee of one of Boxed's fulfilment facilities, you're only making \$14 an hour. I actually have no doubt that Cheih Huang legitimately wants to help. And I'm sure he does. So do most CEOs. My experience has been that great CEOs, who lead companies with great culture, often go out of their way to identify needs among their employees and dig deep to help. Sometimes they use their companies' funds to help, but, very often, they make a personal act of charity.

More importantly, they keep it to themselves. That's a requirement of a good leader. That's also my last objection to Boxed's walk down the aisle of shame: it's so public. Intentions aside, it's hard to fight criticism that Boxed's wedding benefit is just a publicity stunt when you unleash your publicity appartus in support of it.

The company issued a press release and has made sure that the press knows what a great company Boxed is to work for. That's actually bad communications strategy. It's reminiscent of when Dan Price, CEO of Gravity Payments, crowed he was setting a minimum salary of \$70, 000 for all his employees — an announcement made with network television cameras rolling and major-market newspapers given embargoed releases and interviews. We know . Related: Good company culture goes well beyond perks. Perks, more often than not, mask cultural problems.

And just because you think you're " doing good" as a leader . In an era when competition is high for the best and brightest employees, strong pay, generous benefits, open lines of communication from the C-suite on down and a strong mission are what set apart the strongest companies from the pretenders making noise through a steady stream of press releases and stunts.