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Ethnographic Account

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As I have been observing Carter's over the past few weeks, I have enjoyed learning about this community and obtaining information that I did not know before. Coming into this community, I had already pre-labeled Carter's as a team. To me, the employees were a group of people who worked together and without one another, their community would not be as successful. To prove this claim, as I was observing, I had to think about what exactly makes a team. I needed to identify why are they a team and what they do that qualifies them as one. As I discovered from observing this community, a team doesn't always have to be working together at the same time to reach their goals. I could see at Carter's even if employees are doing something by themselves, it's for the best interest of their team. What they do affects everyone else. From the information I gathered from observing Carter's, it became apparent to me how important it was for them to work with one another; and the immense amount of effort they put in to run the store. How they function and work together piece by piece, creates an atmosphere where they can be successful. It is important for Carter's to work as a team, to successfully reach their goals to function smoothly.

My definition of a team is a group of people who all share the same goals, intentions, and work together to be able to reach them. At Carter's, it consists of multiple sales associates and 4 managers. When observing Carter's at the start of their work day, I can hear employees discuss the multiple tasks that need to be completed; which are usually on a deadline. This, to me, was the first important observation that identified them as a team; identifying their goals. Every team

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has goals or a target they want to achieve. I observed that whenever a new employee would come in for their shift, a manager would inform them of the sales goal (the money they need to make for the day) and the tasks that needed to be completed. I thought this was important because individuals in a team must not only be aware of their goals but need to have the drive to want to complete them. I remember from one of my interviews with Savannah, the store manager at Carter's, when I asked her what type of person should work here, she told me "they must be motivated and must be driven." Clearly, being willing to achieve all your goals and putting in full effort is important. Since a lot of tasks need to be completed before the end of the night, being motivated and focused is important at Carter's. From what I observed, everybody in their team is made aware of the tasks and work towards completing them.

From what I could see, the employees took their tasks seriously. The employees would work together to complete tasks like refilling clothes. I would observe the manager on duty talking to sales associates(s) about doing what they call "replan", which is refilling clothes of sizes that they are running low of. The manager would go in the back, unbox the clothes, and put them on a hanger rack. A sales associate(s) would then take that same rack to the front of the store and begin refilling the clothes. Accomplishing a goal like this where employees work together to improve the presentation of the store, contributes to customer satisfaction. I learned from Savannah that the employees who worked the morning and day shifts would complete their tasks. Then, whenever the employees for the night shift would come in, the departing employees

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would inform the incoming ones of the tasks they have done and still needed to be completed.

“We try to get as much done as possible during the day but were usually busier during the day.”

Savannah told me, “So, we usually let the night crew finish the rest of the tasks. Even though I’d rather they do, if they can’t finish, they leave a note to let the morning crew know and they’ll finish it up.” I thought this demonstrated even on different shifts, what the employees do in the morning affects the employees at night. The night and day employees may not work together, but they both are aiming to finish their goals in order to help their team and the store.

I identified the fact that Carter’s has goals, the first thing a team consists of, but I needed to know more. I figured every team has its weak spots. You win together, you all lose together. So, in order to accurately call Carter’s a team, I needed to know the importance of having everyone on their team work up to par. In a standard team, everything affects everything. What you do, good or bad, represents your teammates. An article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* called “In teamwork, one bad apple really does make a difference” by Benjamin Walker, focused on an experiment in which Walker showed how one weak link can bring everyone down, bring dissatisfaction, and can reduce everyone’s performance at work, even if everyone else is pulling their weight. From that article, I thought it was important to know how detrimental the weak link in a team is, especially at Carters. Does it really matter or is it something that goes unnoticed?

To get a perspective on weak links in their team, I asked Sam, one of the managers at Carters, how does a weak link or having someone who is not working as hard affect everyone

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else. Sam told me, “It can affect other people because you’re not helping your team with your strengths, which makes it harder for other people, because now they have the responsibility of having to do your part when they already have to do their own.” An important word in her statement, team. What they essentially do affects their team. Everybody must do their part and work together, not just a couple of people. With Sam’s statement, this validated the second thing that’s makes Carter’s a team, when you have a weak link it affects everybody. I noticed on the wall near the cash wrap a paper of a survey from Carter’s customers. On the survey it evaluated and scored things such as customer service experience, availability of help, speed and ease of checkout, tidiness of store, and friendliness of associates etc. This survey showed the number of responses and unfortunately, compared to last year, the numbers were down. To the dismay of Savannah, who on the sheet of paper expressed her disappointment. Making the store look nice or greeting a customer may be things the employees can do by themselves, but one subpar or bad customer experience can be more memorable than the good ones. Even if most employees may excel in all categories, if one employee does not, it hurts the perception of Carter’s for customers. Which shows what each employee does or doesn’t do affects everyone else. A team all have the same results, and there are not only individual grades when you are working together. At Carter’s what one person does reflect the store and the team.

With a team, creating strong bonds with one another is important. No one wants to be in a negative environment, feel unvalued, or left out. According to “Small Changes Can Build Strong

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Teams” By Cindy Gordon, explains how methods such as group efforts, mentoring, get togethers and setting the example are all important in creating and building strong relationships in the workplace. Based on Gordon’s opinion, I felt it’s important to create a connection with the people you work with to have a supportive environment. I wanted to see the type of effort Carter’s puts in to create a better work atmosphere. In the backroom of the Carter’s store, there was a door full of stickers shaped like stars. On each star it was a compliment to one employee to another, regarding things like thanking them for cleaning the backroom, getting out all the “replan” or just being a good employee. I thought this was a good instance of positivity at Carter’s and was a good way to make employees know their work is being valued. Why does this matter? People want to work with other people that they know have a high opinion of them. Usually, nobody wants their work to go unnoticed.

In the article, “Beyond Leadership: The impact of coworker relationships on employee motivation and intent to stay” by Tessa E. Basford and Lynn Offerman, Basford and Offerman found support for their hypotheses that positive coworker relationships independently increase employee motivation and likelihood of staying. They also mentioned having a coworker who is kind and supportive may ease the strain of a stressful day, while a negative, uncooperative coworker may stress you out more. At Carter’s, while observing I could see a lot of employees already had a strong bond together. I saw them joking around, talking and laughing, showcasing their comfort with one another. I asked Karina, a sales associate, why she thinks it’s important to

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create bonds with her coworkers. She told me, “It makes work more fun. We spend a lot of time together, so it would be awkward if we spent hours not talking at all unless it was about work. That would be super boring.” I also talked to Sam about it and she told me it’s important that everybody is comfortable with one another and is open to having conversations, because it makes work more enjoyable and positive. “If you like somebody, you’re going to like working with them, we want everybody to be comfortable around each other”, Sam also told me. At Carter’s it was important for them to have a bond with their coworkers, creating a better and more fun work environment. As well as having a good relationship with coworkers creates more motivation to complete tasks and makes them more likely to stay.

Coming into this community, I had already assumed Carter’s was a team but did not have any evidence or argument at first to defend that opinion. My definition of a team is a group of people who all share the same goals, intentions, and work together to be able to reach them. I confirmed from my observations that the Carter’s, employees have goals or tasks that they all share, they value positivity and bonding to encourage motivation, and that having a weak link hurts them. All in all, identifying all those things, Carter’s is a team. To other people, calling Carter’s a team might be unusual for them, but Carter’s employees are not just a group of coworkers who happen to have the same job, but a team that works together in order to reach success.

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