

A recipe for a strong organizational culture



Laura Sorensen
Chief People Officer



Christopher Tomasso
President and CEO



Koya Ray
Manager of Operational Excellence

Quick facts

 **Company:** First Watch Restaurants Inc.  **Industry:** Food service

 **Headquarters:** Bradenton, Florida  **Employees:** 10,000

 **Award:** ADP® Meeting of the Minds (MOTM) 2022 Client Award for Culture at Work

 **ADP products featured in this story:** ADP Vantage HCM®, ADP Mobile Solutions, StandOut® by ADP, Wisely® by ADP, ADP DataCloud

First Watch Restaurants Inc. is a breakfast, brunch and lunch concept offering freshly prepared dishes inspired by the position of the sun. The company employs 10,000 people across more than 400 locations in nearly 30 states. Their culture is based on “you first,” the idea that empowering and giving employees what they need to succeed first positively influences their ability to consistently provide customers with a delightful, engaging and memorable restaurant experience. Read on to learn more about First Watch’s culture and how the company has worked with ADP to enable the planning and activation of many of its cultural values.

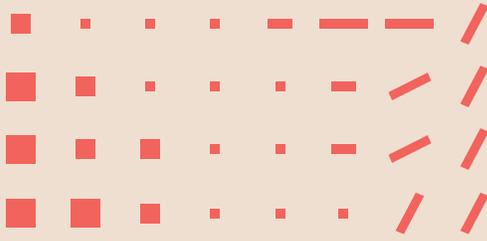
The ingredients of a ‘you first’ organizational culture

Laura: I think our people and our culture really make us stand out. They’re our true differentiator. I ask this question to our employees all the time: “What makes us special? What makes us stand out to you?” And they mention the team, but they continually come back to this word “family,” that it feels like a family.

We describe our culture in two words — “you first” — which can seem simple, but there’s so much meaning behind those two words. We put our employees first, so they can, in turn, put the customers first, and that permeates through everything that we do, every decision that we make.



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We have a lot of practices in place to make sure we're enabling that "you first" culture in the restaurant. One thing we do is empower employees with decision-making abilities that they may not have at other places. We use something called veto responsibility, where any employee in the restaurant can send food back to the kitchen if they see that it's not made to our standards. I think allowing our employees to make those kinds of decisions and empowering them with that so they don't have to go and get a manager does a lot for our employees. It does a lot for the customer experience. And it does a lot for our culture.

Enabling 'you first' with ADP during the COVID-19 pandemic

Laura: We saw during COVID-19 the results of our culture, and we really saw how that paid out for us. Unfortunately, we had to furlough our employees at one point during the height of COVID-19. When we reopened our doors, 100 percent of our directors of operations returned, 75 percent of our early employees with three or more years of service returned. And we know that's a direct result of the culture that we created. Over the last two years, ADP has really played an important role in our strategy, in enabling that culture, in allowing us to provide an amazing employee experience. We use their [ADP Vantage HCM platform](#). We use their unemployment platform, their ACA platform. I'm sure I'm forgetting something else.

Having the [ADP mobile app](#) has been so beneficial for our employees but also for us. It's hard for any company to stay connected to its hourly workforce. We determined that over 70 percent of our employees were looking at the ADP mobile app on a regular basis, and so we've used this to stay in contact with them, to put out information that's meaningful to them and make sure that we've got that solid connection.

When we first temporarily shut our doors for the safety of all our customers and employees, ADP was still there with us so that we could maintain our operations behind the scenes, so that we could stay in touch with our employees. We ran reports so that we were able to communicate with them. These were reporting tools out of ADP that allowed us to make sure we had the information, by territory, of every single employee and their phone number, which we were able to provide to every regional vice president so they could reach out to their employees on a regular basis to check in and see how they were doing. That meant the world to our employees, just to have that personal connection, but we would not have had that data had it not been for ADP.

We also set up a "you first" emergency assistance fund. ADP reporting played a huge role in that so that we could establish feeds between America's Charities, who we leveraged to set that up as a 501(c)(3), and ADP. Through that program, to date, we've been able to provide nearly \$850,000 in tax-free grants to our employees. All these efforts I think helped continue that culture even when we were closed.

We reopened June 1, 2020, and ADP was with us every step of the way.

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Laura Sorensen
Chief People Officer



Putting employees first with easy pay access during COVID-19

Koya: From a financial standpoint, the ADP mobile app was beneficial for me because any question that I had about my pay, the answer was simply right there on the app. It's very user-friendly and you could just go on there and pull up anything that you needed to know about your pay. I was able to look at my taxes. I was able to see the benefits that I was signed up for, the things that I was eligible for. During COVID, that was very pertinent for me, being able to access my finances and being able to just log into the app. It's very, very easy to use. I have it set up to where it does the face ID, so I just click on the app, put it up to my face and log in.

ADP has been most influential in my life because I know that I can go on the mobile app and go through and check my finances. Just like you can check your bank account, you can check your ADP account and you can know what money you have going on your card.

Laura: We leverage [Wisely pay cards](#) for all our employees. We have them sign up during onboarding. It's one of the first things they do and that enables us to provide them with prompt payment. In some cases, we can get them immediate pay when they need it.

Koya: One of the features that I love about the Wisely pay card is I have the option to get paid two days earlier. You never know what could happen. Life happens and life doesn't care about your pay date. It does not care if you're paid on the 28th. If you don't have the money on the 26th, guess what? That bill is still going to come through. I just love that feature, that I have that option to get paid two days earlier. That was very, very beneficial and very helpful for me personally.

Enhancing 'you first' with ADP's employee engagement tools

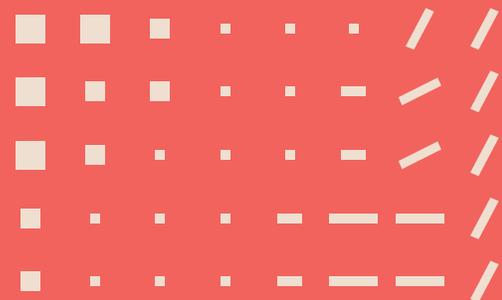
Laura: Part of our culture is about letting our employees be themselves, letting them do the right thing, leveraging their strengths, which is everything that StandOut is about.

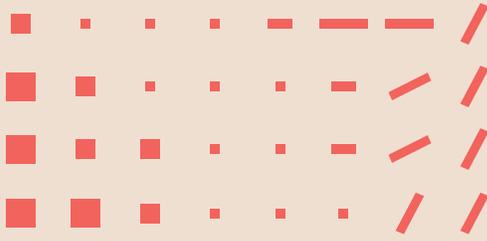
[StandOut](#) is a comprehensive tool that encourages managers and employees to lead with their strengths and it fosters ongoing dialogue between the supervisor and the employee. It's an online platform where they have weekly check-ins, so instead of waiting for an annual performance review to have a meaningful conversation with your supervisor about what you're working on, each week, you can check in with the StandOut platform to talk about what you love during the week, what you loathe during the week, things that we know are driving engagement.

We know StandOut is a great tool that helps with engagement and retention, and it just lets our employees be themselves and know what their strengths are so that they can be a better version of themselves.

The ADP mobile app was beneficial for me because any question that I had about my pay, the answer was simply right there on the app.

Koya Ray
Manager of Operational Excellence





Fortifying 'you first' with ADP's diversity, equity and inclusion analytics

Laura: After George Floyd's murder, we posted a diversity statement on our website, but we knew that we needed to do more than just talk about diversity. We wanted to have a lot of action behind our words. So, we developed "Seven Steps Towards Change" to help us evolve.

Within "Seven Steps Towards Change," we have mentorships, scholarships, recruiting practices, outreach programs, education and training and development. We immediately rolled out unconscious bias training to everyone in the company, but we wanted to do something more than that, so we developed what we called our "Be a Better Human" series. This was a six-part interactive live web series that I and our head of training and development did, where folks could call in each week for a new topic that was related to diversity and inclusion.

Christopher: There was a wake-up call around the time of the George Floyd murder. We looked at ourselves and said, "What can we be doing better? What can we be doing differently? How can we contribute to this?" We were in the middle of a pandemic, but we felt this was extremely important and put a lot of time and effort into a mentorship program, what we call the Race Inclusion Support Exchange (RISE) Council, where we have some folks around the country who help guide us in our principles and our policies going forward. We stepped out more aggressively than we ever had before, and it made us a better company.

Laura: ADP's products have played an instrumental role in helping to inform some of our decisions around diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I). Their reporting allows us to really focus on what's most important and get a sense of where we have strengths within DE&I and where we have opportunities. We're able to run analytics to know exactly what our population looks like at every single level of the organization. It allows us to see as we go up the organization how those diversity metrics change and where we want to target our efforts.

The best decisions that we can make as an organization are ones that are based on solid data or information that our employees are giving back to us. So, in addition to the feedback that we continue to collect from our employees, having data from [ADP DataCloud](#) with reporting helps us to make sure that we're focused on the right things.

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Laura Sorensen
Chief People Officer

Recognition of 'you first' with ADP's Culture at Work award

Koya: My reaction about hearing First Watch receiving the award was, "About time."

Christopher: When I first heard about the Culture at Work award, it was in an email from Laura with a lot of exclamation points. I could tell how excited she was about it and we're excited about it, too. I think the focus that we put on our culture, on our people — it's nice to be recognized for that. It is not why we do it, but it is nice. For us to be called out and selected for it makes us really proud.

Laura: I think we've won the Culture at Work award because of our commitment to providing a consistent, excellent culture for our employees. When I first heard the news — I must admit I'm not an emotional person — but I get tears in my eyes because this is huge for us and it just confirms everything that we're about with this people-centric culture, with our mission of "you first."



Having data from ADP DataCloud with reporting helps us to make sure that we're focused on the right things.

Laura Sorensen
Chief People Officer

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