



*National Center for the
Middle Market Case Study*

Gamer Packaging leans into culture to drive growth

COMPANY: **GAMER PACKAGING**
HEADQUARTERS: **MINNEAPOLIS, MN**

TOPIC: **TALENT & LEADERSHIP**
INDUSTRY: **BUSINESS SERVICES**

OVERVIEW

Talent remains one of the most important drivers of middle market success. According to recent Middle Market Indicator data, more than one-third of middle market companies rank attracting and retaining talent among their top five strategic priorities, while nearly two-thirds report making significant investments in employee training and skill development. Research further suggests that [high-growth companies place particular emphasis on their people](#), viewing human capital as a competitive differentiator rather than a resource to manage.

Yet attracting and retaining top talent remains a persistent challenge for two-thirds of companies. Unlike large enterprises, middle market companies often compete without the benefit of widely recognized brands, expansive recruiting budgets or extensive employee perks.

Great culture can help. Our data shows that [companies that prioritize creating a great place to work](#) often outperform their peers, achieving stronger growth than organizations primarily focused on operational efficiency, customer centricity or risk management. A strong culture not only helps companies find and keep talent, but also strengthens engagement, collaboration and long-term performance.

This case study examines how a middle market packaging and distribution company has intentionally invested in building a connected workforce. Through leadership restructuring, physical workplace improvements and employee engagement, the company has created a culture that supports employee satisfaction and business growth.



Gamer Packaging is a family-owned full-service custom packaging and distribution company serving customers across the food, beverage, personal care and other consumer products industries. Founded in 1987 by packaging industry veteran Ron Gamer, the company, now under second- and third-generation leadership, experienced accelerated growth over the past two decades, reaching approximately \$250 million in annual revenue in 2025. Gamer Packaging thrives on a relationship-driven approach to business, and its team of nearly 80 employees is a critical asset. The staff at the downtown Minneapolis headquarters, together with a distributed network of remote sales professionals and specialists, helps cultivate the strong customer and supplier relationships that underpin the company's success.

The opportunity:

STRENGTHEN CULTURE AND CONNECTION TO SUPPORT CONTINUED GROWTH

By 2020, Gamer Packaging had grown from a small family business into a \$175 million company with employees spread across multiple functions, geographies and customer segments. While the company's growth reflected years of success, leadership began to recognize that the close-knit culture that had fueled the business was becoming more difficult to maintain at scale.

As the organization expanded, teams became increasingly organized around customer verticals and specialized functions. Separate groups developed their own leaders, priorities and ways of working. With employees on different teams physically located on different floors of the Minneapolis headquarters, opportunities for cross-functional collaboration were few and far between.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the challenge. Demand for food, beverage and personal care packaging surged, driving some of the company's strongest sales years. However, remote work further reduced informal interactions and relationship-building. New hires struggled to integrate into the organization and develop the same level of effectiveness and connection as employees who had spent years working alongside colleagues.

A leadership change at the top, coupled with a return to in-person work, presented the ideal opportunity to address broader cultural challenges. With the founder's son, Kenny Gamer, retiring after 12 years as CEO, and Kenny's wife, Paula, stepping up into the head role after serving as COO since 2010, the stage was set. Paula and her leadership team brought energy and conviction to reconnecting the team.

Leadership chose to reopen the office before many other major downtown employers, despite significant employee pushback. The decision reflected a commitment to breaking down organizational silos and rebuilding in-person connections. They aimed to revive the engaged family business culture that had long differentiated Gamer Packaging and would position the business for its next phase of growth.



"It starts out so slow. It took us five years to get to the \$100 million mark. But then the company just kept growing, and none of us had ever run a \$100 million-plus business before. We became really fractured without even realizing it was happening."

PAULA GAMER,
GAMER PACKAGING,
PRESIDENT AND CEO



The approach/solution:

INVEST STRATEGICALLY IN PEOPLE AND PLACE

Gamer Packaging pursued a series of intentional investments in leadership, workplace design and employee development to create a more connected, collaborative and scalable organization.

1 REALIGN LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE FOR GROWTH

When Minneapolis-area employees returned to the office for two days a week in 2022, leadership gained a clearer view of how the organization was operating after years of remote work and where it was falling short. “That’s when it really hit me how dysfunctional these siloed teams had become,” says Paula Gamer, CEO. “And that’s when we started making some really big changes in our executive leadership team to bring everyone back together.”

The company consolidated multiple vertical sales teams under a single leadership structure with a new chief commercial officer role and supporting managers, creating greater alignment around a shared vision for growth and customer service. The new structure eliminated competition among the separate sales teams, encouraged collaboration to support customers across industries and product categories, and created a more scalable operating model.

2 INVESTING IN A WORKPLACE WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO BE

As collaboration improved, Paula and her team recognized that for in-person interaction to play a truly meaningful role in rebuilding connections, the workplace itself needed to support that goal. Taking advantage of favorable conditions in the downtown Minneapolis office market following the pandemic, Gamer Packaging relocated from a Class B office space to a premier Class A building, committing to an 11-year lease and a long-term investment in the company’s people and future. The new headquarters included updated furnishings and spaces intentionally designed to encourage relationship building among employees.

With the move, the company increased its in-office expectations from two to three days per week. Rather than simply asking employees to spend more time in the office, leadership created an environment that made the commute worthwhile and reinforced the value of working together in person. The new office became a visible symbol of the company’s commitment to its people, its culture and its long-term future in Minneapolis

“What worked when you were a \$10 million company may not work when you’re a \$100 million or \$250 million company. You have to be willing to look at your structure, ask whether it’s scalable and not be afraid to pivot.”

PAULA GAMER,
GAMER PACKAGING,
PRESIDENT AND CEO





“We wanted to bring some new energy to the organization. Our old office was functional, but the new space gave us an opportunity to create an environment where people really wanted to be.”

MICHELLE ROTH,
GAMER PACKAGING,
DIRECTOR OF HUMAN
RESOURCES

3

STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS THE ORGANIZATION

With roughly one-third of its workforce remaining remote to support customers across the country, Gamer Packaging wanted to think beyond its physical headquarters and take a more intentional approach to building connections between all its people. Leadership initially explored development programs focused on executives and managers but ultimately identified a greater opportunity to invest in every employee.

In 2025, the company partnered with Positive Foundry to implement BetterYet, a 52-week workplace development program focused on personal growth, emotional intelligence, resilience, communication and well-being. Employees met in small groups intentionally composed of individuals from different departments, functions and locations. Each week, participants spent 30 minutes together discussing short lessons and sharing personal experiences.

To encourage authentic conversations, employee champions, rather than company leaders, facilitated the discussions. Managers and executives participated alongside everyone else, creating an environment where employees could connect as peers rather than through traditional organizational hierarchies.

Despite some initial skepticism, BetterYet quickly gained momentum. Employees began forming relationships with colleagues they wouldn't normally interact with at work—the accounting clerk in Minneapolis and the sales representative from California, for example, began learning about each other's families, interests and experiences both inside and outside of work.

While BetterYet provided valuable personal and professional development tools, the greatest impact was helping employees feel part of a single team. The relationships formed extended beyond the formal curriculum, with employees launching a voluntary book club and other informal opportunities to stay connected and maintain a sense of belonging and shared culture.





4 REINFORCING CULTURE THROUGH SHARED EXPERIENCES

Just as employees wanted to sustain the BetterYet momentum, Gamer Packaging recognized that building connections and culture was not a one-time initiative. The company now invests in regular opportunities for employees to interact, collaborate and engage with one another throughout the year.

One of the longest-running traditions is the annual employee meeting, held each October. The event brings together employees from across the organization, including remote team members, for two and a half days of in-person business updates, team-building activities and relationship building. At the most recent meeting, many employees requested the opportunity to spend time with their BetterYet groups, and the company organized a Harvest Pack volunteer activity to give back to the community while combining teamwork, friendly competition and a sense of purpose.

“Our annual meeting, when we all come together, is the highlight of our year,” says Michelle Roth, Director of Human Resources. “Coming together in person is so important. The connection is invaluable. You can feel the energy, and everyone leaves recharged.”

To help maintain some of that spark year-round, the employee-led Gamer Spirit Group organizes regular social activities, community engagement

opportunities and charitable initiatives. This includes seasonal traditions, such as pumpkin bowling, as well as activities that intentionally include both Minneapolis-based and remote employees, like Super Bowl commercial bingo.

Community involvement is also central to the company’s culture. Employees nominate and vote on charitable organizations to support through employee-directed giving programs, with donations matched by the company. Each team member can participate in causes that matter personally to them through paid volunteer time.

Together, these programs help reinforce the relationships, sense of belonging and shared purpose that leadership views as essential to sustaining strong culture in a growing organization.



The results:

STRONG CULTURE. STRONGER GROWTH.

Gamer Packaging's investments have strengthened its culture in ways employees can feel and the business can measure. Employees report a stronger sense of community, greater well-being and increased enthusiasm for coming to work. This shows up in happy customers, increased sales and the impressive tenure of the team. Gamer Packaging enjoys exceptionally low turnover; its third employee ever hired remains on board today as the company's longest-standing veteran, with 36 years of service.

The cultural impact extends well beyond the company's own walls, with Gamer Packaging continuing to receive attention from top talent and unsolicited praise from customers and suppliers. The result is a culture that has become a competitive advantage, helping Gamer Packaging scale without losing the values that fueled its success.

86%

OF WELL-BEING,
ENGAGEMENT,
AND CULTURE
MEASURES
IMPROVED
THROUGH
BETTER YET

92%

OF EMPLOYEES
EXPERIENCED
AN INCREASE IN
PERSONAL WELL-
BEING

97%

OF EMPLOYEES
FEEL A STRONGER
CONNECTION TO
THEIR TEAM

30%

YEAR-OVER-YEAR
GROSS SALES
GROWTH DRIVEN
BY HAPPIER,
MORE ENGAGED
EMPLOYEES



To learn more about
Gamer Packaging, please
visit gamerpackaging.com

LEARNINGS FOR OTHER MIDDLE MARKET COMPANIES

People and culture can be a powerful secret sauce!

What works to engage employees when you're a \$10M company might not work when you're a \$100M or \$250M company; be prepared to pivot accordingly.

Space matters. If you're trying to encourage remote workers to come back to the office, investing in an enticing space can make a huge difference.

It takes a catalyst to break down silos. Company events and programs that create opportunities for interaction beyond function make a huge difference.



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