



# The Power of Buy-In

# THE POWER OF BUY-IN

## Key Takeaways from Tyler Gillum, Head Coach, Savannah Bananas

The Savannah Bananas are not a conventional baseball team. They are, by most measures, one of the most recognizable entertainment brands in sports – selling out every game since 2016, generating a wait list of millions for tickets, and building a global following through a relentless commitment to the ultimate fan experience. Their approach to building that culture – and the principles behind it – translates directly to the challenges that HR and people leaders face every day.

Tyler Gillum, the team's head coach, spoke to attendees of Acrisure's 6th annual HR Leaders Compliance Summit about what it actually takes to build a culture where people show up: fully, consistently, and by choice. This white paper summarizes the key frameworks and actionable ideas from Tyler's keynote, with a focus on how organizations of any size can apply them. Tyler's central message: compliance keeps you out of trouble, but culture is what drives people to show up fully. And the two are more connected than most organizations realize.

### THE FIVE C'S: A FRAMEWORK FOR BUILDING BUY-IN

The framework the Savannah Bananas use to build the kind of culture where people genuinely want to show up is called the Five C's. These aren't just cultural aspirations, but mandatory disciplines.

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| <b>C1<br/>CLARITY</b>     | Define the vision in vivid, specific terms. What does it look like? Sound like? Feel like? People can't move toward a destination they cannot see. Clarity is the precondition for everything else. |
| <b>C2<br/>CHARACTER</b>   | Identify the characteristics of your A-players: the people who raise the bar. Hire for those characteristics intentionally. Talent matters, but fit matters more.                                   |
| <b>C3<br/>CONNECTION</b>  | Build genuine trust with your team. Know them as people first. Create conditions for vulnerability and transparency. Strong culture is built on relationship, not just role.                        |
| <b>C4<br/>COMMITMENT</b>  | Define your non-negotiables. What are you committed to regardless of circumstance? Commitment is the anchor when things get hard.   |
| <b>C5<br/>CONSISTENCY</b> | Show up the same way, every day. Culture is built in the daily consistency of behavior from leaders and team members alike.   |

While the five C's aren't sequential (they operate simultaneously), clarity does come first for a reason. You can't recruit for character without knowing what you're building. You cannot create connection without commitment. You cannot sustain commitment without consistency. Start with the vision, and build outward from there.

# THE POWER OF BUY-IN

Key Takeaways from Tyler Gillum, Head Coach, Savannah Bananas

**“Set the tone, or the tone is going to set you.”**

— Tyler Gillum, Head Coach, Savannah Bananas

One of the biggest takeaways from the Bananas' playbook is their onboarding philosophy. The first day for new players and staff (called Fans First Orientation) isn't your typical paperwork session. It's an immersive experience designed to make the vision tangible from the very first moment. New players park a short distance from the stadium, get picked up by buses with DJs and confetti, and are welcomed in a way that makes the culture undeniable before a single form is signed.

The principle here is simple but underutilized: the first impression you give an employee sets the tone for how they understand your organization. Most onboarding processes spend 90% of their time on compliance and paperwork, and almost nothing on the why. The Bananas invert that ratio, (at least on day one). It's true that not every company gets to have party buses and confetti canons, but most of us can admit we could certainly liven up the introductions to new employees on their first day.

The Bananas also document every touchpoint in the employee and fan experience, and they really do mean all of it. From the moment someone sees a social media post to when they leave the stadium, there is a written narrative so comprehensive it takes over an hour to read. Every single interaction point is mapped, evaluated, and continuously improved. The question constantly applied to each one: “how do we make this better?”

## QUESTIONS TO BRING BACK TO YOUR ORGANIZATION

- What does your new employee's first hour actually feel like? Does it reflect your culture or just your compliance checklist?
- Have you mapped major touchpoints in the employee experience from recruiting through onboarding through day-to-day work?
- Can you articulate your organizational vision in a way that is specific enough for someone new to feel it — not just understand it intellectually?
- What does "plus the experience" mean in your context? What is one touchpoint you could improve this month?

# THE POWER OF BUY-IN

Key Takeaways from Tyler Gillum, Head Coach, Savannah Bananas

## CHARACTER: HIRE FOR FIT, NOT JUST FOR CREDENTIALS

One of the most immediately applicable frameworks is the approach to hiring. The Savannah Bananas have a document they send to every prospective hire called a VCE – Vision, Challenges, Expectations. Rather than a standard job description, it is a candid portrait of the role: what the organization is trying to build, what is genuinely hard about the work, and what characteristics they are looking for in the people who will do it well.

The VCE is intentionally designed to be daunting; they want candidates to self-select based on full information. The VCE describes long hours, unconventional demands, and the expectation that everyone, from interns to the head coach, contributes to the fan experience.

**“It's not always about getting the most talented - it's about getting the right players on the bus.”**

– Tyler Gillum

The interview process itself is unusual, but on-brand for the Bananas. Rather than a formal, structured sit-down interview for every candidate, the team will invite promising prospects to spend a weekend at the ballpark: attending games, seeing behind the scenes, meeting the team, well before any formal offer is extended. This serves two purposes: it lets the candidate experience the culture firsthand, and it lets the organization observe the candidate in a real environment rather than an artificial one.

They also incorporate a 10-year vision goal conversation into every hiring discussion. Where does this person want to be in a decade? If their answer is small or vague, it signals a potential mismatch. The Bananas are building something large and want people whose ambitions are calibrated accordingly. The goal is to find alignment between the individual's aspirations and the organization's direction – because that alignment, more than any credential, predicts who will thrive.



# THE POWER OF BUY-IN

Key Takeaways from Tyler Gillum, Head Coach, Savannah Bananas

## QUESTIONS TO BRING BACK TO YOUR ORGANIZATION

- Does your job description honestly describe what about the role is hard? If not, you may be setting new hires up for early disappointment.
- Consider creating a VCE-style document for key roles: what the vision is, what the genuine challenges are, and what characteristics define success.
- Are your interviews testing fit and energy, or primarily credentials and experience? Consider adding experiential components where possible.
- Ask candidates about their long-term goals. Whether those goals align with your organization's direction is meaningful signal.

## CHARACTER: HIRE FOR FIT, NOT JUST FOR CREDENTIALS

**“Coach the person first, and the player second.”**

– Dabo Swinney, Head Football Coach - Clemson University

Connection, in the Bananas' culture, is not a soft concept. It is a structured practice, but one that you can't force. Tyler has a winning formula that he uses to open up genuine conversations called: Hero, Highlight, Hardship, and Hope.

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| HERO      | Who has had the most significantly positive impact on your life?<br>What did they teach you? |
| HIGHLIGHT | What is a defining achievement or moment in your life that you are proud of?                 |
| HARDSHIP  | What has been the most difficult thing you have faced? How did you get through it?           |
| HOPE      | What are you working toward? What are you hoping for in your life and career?                |

# THE POWER OF BUY-IN

## Key Takeaways from Tyler Gillum, Head Coach, Savannah Bananas

These aren't just icebreakers, but genuine leadership practice. When leaders are willing to be vulnerable and share their own answers (particularly the hardship piece) it creates permission for others to do the same. That vulnerability is the foundation on which real trust is built. And trust, in his experience, is what separates teams that perform from teams that merely comply.

### QUESTIONS TO BRING BACK TO YOUR ORGANIZATION

- When did you last have a conversation with a direct report that was about who they are, not just what they do?
- Consider running the Hero, Highlight, Hardship, Hope exercise with your team in a low-stakes setting – a team meeting, a lunch, an offsite.
- Authenticity is contagious. If leaders share genuinely, their teams typically follow. Where are you modeling vulnerability?
- The goal is connection before direction. People follow leaders they trust, not leaders they merely respect.

### COMMITMENT & CONSISTENCY: CULTURE IS BUILT IN THE DAILY DETAILS

The Savannah Bananas operate on “Fans First Principles” – a set of non-negotiables that govern how every person in the organization, from ownership to intern, is expected to show up. Here are a couple of the big ones:

#### Whatever's Normal, Do the Exact Opposite

The Bananas built their entire brand on this principle. Their senior citizen dance team, “The Banana Nanas”, all age 75 and older, exists because the question was asked: “What would happen if we replaced cheerleaders with something no one has ever seen?” In an organizational context, this translates to a willingness to question assumption, and shake things up. The most memorable employee experiences, the most creative retention strategies, and the most distinctive cultures almost always came from someone asking: “why do we do it this way?”

#### Ideas Are Everything – And Scheduling Them Works

Every Tuesday, the Savannah Bananas hold what they call an Idea Palooza – or OTT (Over the Top) meeting. The stated goal is to come up with ideas so ambitious that people aren't sure they can be executed. The point is not to implement every idea, but to exercise those creative muscles. Ideas are taken on Tuesday, refined Wednesday and Thursday, and piloted in games on the weekend. Many fail. That's OK; it's literally built into the model. For organizations looking to build more innovative cultures, the takeaway is structural: creativity doesn't happen by accident, but when it's scheduled, protected, and celebrated.

# THE POWER OF BUY-IN

Key Takeaways from Tyler Gillum, Head Coach, Savannah Bananas

## Fewer Things Done Better

The Bananas say no constantly: to licensing deals, to product extensions, to opportunities that would dilute their focus on live shows. The discipline to keep the main thing the main thing is a leadership decision, not a resource constraint. In a world that equates “more” with productivity, this principle is a genuine challenge to examine: what is your organization's “main thing,” and how much of your energy actually goes toward it?

## Uphold the Highest Standard – And Define What That Means

Tyler shared a simple but revealing story: a seven-year-old makes his bed to the best of his ability. Then, his father shows him what a higher standard looks like when he makes his own bed. Then they walk into a Ritz Carlton and discover that a handwritten note and towel art represent yet another level above that. The lesson isn't that standards are always someone else's; it's that “high standards” means something specific in your organization, and that specificity has to be modeled, taught, and reinforced. Vague expectations produce inconsistent results. Specificity produces culture.

### QUESTIONS TO BRING BACK TO YOUR ORGANIZATION

- What are your organization's non-negotiables? Can every employee articulate them without looking at a poster?
- Do you revisit your values regularly with stories – or do they live only in the handbook?
- When did you last say no to something good in order to protect something great?
- What does “highest standard” mean in your context? Have you defined it specifically enough for someone new to actually hit it?

## SUSTAINING CULTURE: ON BURNOUT, BALANCE, AND CELEBRATION

During the Q&A portion of Tyler's keynote, one of the most resonant exchanges came around the question of burnout, because the Bananas operate at an intensity that would exhaust most organizations. How do they sustain it?

**“People that are burned out – were they ever really on fire?”**

– Tyler Gillum

Tyler's view: burnout isn't always “burnout”; it's a signal of a deeper issue of misalignment. What's needed for individuals who are highly invested in the organization, is the deliberate construction of a life and schedule that integrates meaningful rest and recharge rather than simply offsetting work with occasional vacations that delay the inevitable.

# THE POWER OF BUY-IN

## Key Takeaways from Tyler Gillum, Head Coach, Savannah Bananas

Leaders have to enable that to happen; that means understanding what actually replenishes the people on their teams, and creating conditions that make it practical, not just possible.

The Bananas also have another practical suggestion for HR professionals specifically, who often described their roles as reactive and draining: reframe the job as a celebration function. The Savannah Bananas don't have HR, they have "People and Culture". That name isn't cosmetic; it reflects a genuine shift in how the team thinks about its purpose. Rather than managing problems (reactive), the orientation is toward celebrating wins, recognizing milestones, and proactively uplifting people (proactive).

This doesn't mean ignoring the "boring" parts of HR. It means consciously counterbalancing them with the moments where the job is genuinely joyful: the births, the anniversaries, the promotions, the small wins that go unacknowledged. Celebration uplifts both the person being celebrated and the person doing the celebrating.

### QUESTIONS TO BRING BACK TO YOUR ORGANIZATION

- Is your HR or People function predominantly reactive (handling problems) or proactive (building culture and celebrating people)? What would it take to shift the ratio?
- Consider renaming or reframing your HR function around its aspirational identity – what do you want people to think of when they think of your people team?
- What is your organization's cadence of celebration? Is it deliberate or accidental?
- For team leaders experiencing burnout: look at the five people your team members spend the most time with. Are those relationships energizing or draining?

### THE TAKEAWAY: COMPLIANCE AND CULTURE ARE NOT SEPARATE

The Savannah Bananas built something genuinely remarkable – a global brand, sold-out stadiums, and a team that generates one million social media followers for a single player in a year. But beneath the entertainment and the kilts and the Banana Nanas is a set of operational disciplines that any organization can study and apply. Clarity of vision. Intentional hiring. Structured connection. Defined commitment. Daily consistency.

The question Tyler and his team leaves to the audience is this: what would it look like in your organization to be fans first? To build every touchpoint, every hire, every team interaction around the experience of the people you serve?

**For questions about building people-first culture strategies or connecting these frameworks to your organization's HR and benefits programs, reach out to your Acrisure advisor.**



**ACRISURE®**

The information contained herein is provided for informational purposes only and should not be viewed as a substitute for any legal or other professional advice on any particular issue, for any particular reason, or on any particular subject matter. While the information contained herein has been compiled from sources reasonably believed to be reliable, no warranty, guarantee, or representation, either expressed or implied, is made as to the correctness or sufficiency of any representation contained herein. The author's statements and opinions regarding the subject matter expressed represent the opinions, positions or beliefs of the presenters themselves and do not necessarily reflect the opinions, positions or beliefs of Acrisure, LLC or its affiliates (collectively "Acrisure"). By providing the information herein, Acrisure does not undertake any obligation to provide any updates thereto, provide any additional information or materials, or correct any inaccuracies that may become apparent. To the maximum extent permitted by law, any responsibility or liability for the content and information contained herein is hereby expressly disclaimed.

© 2026 Acrisure, LLC. All rights reserved.