WHY YOUR COMPANY'S CORE VALUES AREN'T ENOUGH

Our Core Values

Integrity.

Honesty.

Fairness.

Diversity.

Inclusion.

Teamwork.

CultureWise®

INTEGRITY. INNOVATION. COMMITMENT. TEAMWORK.

Integrity. Innovation. Commitment. Teamwork. You've probably seen values like these on company website banners or framed on office walls—maybe even your company's walls. The powerful words are prominently displayed to make an impression on everyone who visits the site or walks through the door. These values are what the company stands for.

Business leaders believe these carefully selected principles will represent their organizations and inspire their employees. Many are also convinced that their core values will generate a strong culture that will distinguish their business from the competition.

That's partly correct. Workplace culture definitely has the power to elevate a company to the top of its field—but it isn't defined by values displayed on a wall.

An organization's culture is manifested in the way people behave every day.

A company's values are only meaningful if the people who work there demonstrate them—all the time. And unless the actions and attitudes of employees consistently reflect them, those thought-fully crafted values are just words.

The Difference Between Values and Behaviors

It's certainly not wrong to establish values for your company; they indicate the high standards you want your brand to reflect.

But two things can limit their ability to shape your workplace culture:

1. **Values are broad concepts subject to interpretation**
2. **Values are usually nouns that reflect an idea—not an action**

Both characteristics make it hard for people to incorporate values into their daily work. In fact, a study featured in the MIT Sloan Management Review revealed no correlation between official values and corporate culture in employees' eyes.

People Interpret Values Many Ways

If you ask five staff members for their definition of a value like "integrity," you're likely to get five different answers. For example, one person may say that it means being honest. Someone else may believe it's treating people with respect, while others may think it means living up to a personal code, and so on.

None of these answers are wrong. But the disparity shows that everyone in the group will be following a different drummer while trying to adhere to this value.

On the other hand, when you describe a concrete behavior to team members, they can easily understand how to perform it. The description would mean the same thing to everybody, and personal interpretation would be unnecessary.

So don't ask your people to follow abstract concepts. Instead, bring those values to life by explaining and teaching the specific behaviors that will make your company stand out.

Behaviors Are Action Words

Values and behaviors differ in another meaningful way:

Company values tend to be nouns that describe an idea but don't convey how it can be actualized. Employees may appreciate the value and want to live up to it but don't know exactly how to do it.

Conversely, unlike noun-based values, behaviors are expressed with verbs that describe an action. Consider the following examples of values versus behaviors with descriptions:

Value: QUALITY
Behavior: Make Quality Personal
Demonstrate a passion for excellence and take pride in the quality of everything you touch and everything you do. Have a healthy dislike for mediocrity. Good is not good enough. Always ask yourself, "Is this my best work?"

Value: INTEGRITY
Behavior: Act with Integrity
Demonstrate an unwavering commitment to doing the right thing in every action you take and in every decision you make, especially when no one's looking. Always tell the truth, no matter the consequences. If you make a mistake, own up to it, apologize, and make it right.

Value: TEAMWORK
Behavior: Think Team First
It's not about you. Don't let your ego or personal agenda get in the way of doing what's best for the team. Be there for each other and be willing to step into another role or help a co-worker when that's what's required for success. Help each other to succeed.

Additionally, some behaviors don't naturally tie in with core values, but should be integrated into an organization's culture to ensure its success. For instance, you may want your employees to consistently:

Get Clear on Expectations
Create clarity and avoid misunderstandings by discussing expectations upfront. Set expectations for others and ask when you're not clear on what they expect of you. End all meetings with clarity about action items, responsibilities, and due dates.

Look Ahead and Anticipate

Solve problems before they happen by anticipating future issues, planning for contingencies, and addressing them in advance. Work with appropriate lead times. Preventing issues is always better than fixing them.

Practice Blameless Problem-solving

Demonstrate a relentless solution focus, rather than pointing fingers or dwelling on problems. Identify lessons learned and use those lessons to improve ourselves and our processes so we don't make the same mistake twice. Get smarter with every mistake. Learn from every experience.

When you tell employees what they are expected to do and describe how they're supposed to do it, they have a clear path to follow. And managers are more effective when they promote coachable behaviors instead of trying to drive values home.

Keeping it Real–Accountability and Consistency

Accountability.

One critical distinction between values and behaviors is that values don't evoke accountability. An employee can say, and even believe, that they're living up to their company's values. But unless they do something egregious, it's hard to make them accountable for reflecting an abstract concept.

As CultureWise Founder and CEO David J. Friedman explains, "Because they're so action-oriented, behaviors are much easier to teach, guide, and give people feedback about. It's hard to give people feedback about a value."

When people don't have specific instructions and benchmarks to hit, it's tough for them to progress. Values don't provide staff with the tools to achieve organizational goals.

Clearly defined behaviors are another story. They give employees and management the ability to detect whether expectations are being met. For example, an indeterminate value like "Service" is open-ended. But if leaders provide team members with a definition of what exemplary service looks like in their organization, they have a roadmap.

When employees are offered specific behaviors to follow, they know what they're expected to do and how to be accountable for doing it.

Consistency is the key!

Values are strong words with vague parameters. For example, a value like "Teamwork" is admirable. But it doesn't offer clues about when and how to apply the concept. That lack of clarity is likely to translate into well-intentioned collaboration attempts that often fall short.

The nondescript quality of "Teamwork" can also mean that people think about it sometimes, but not all the time. And that's a problem. Unless they understand how to make a consistent effort to support each other, they're not living up to this value.

Things are different when a company provides clear guidelines for **the behavior associated with teamwork** versus asking people to live up to the concept of **teamwork.**

If employees are shown practical ways to link teamwork to everything they do with and for their coworkers, they'll routinely apply this defined behavior. Ultimately, teamwork won't just be a word; it will become second nature.

Go Beyond Core Values to Develop a Powerful Culture

To build an exceptional reputation for your company, you need to operationalize the ideals it stands for. The key to making this initiative happen is articulating and practicing the behaviors that will set your company apart.

CultureWise has helped [CEOs across North America](#) identify, define, and systematically reinforce the behaviors that drive success. This innovative system provides leaders with everything they need to create and sustain a high-performing culture.

[Schedule a call with one of our specialists](#) to learn how CultureWise can help transform your company.