Core Values

Every society has a set of principles by which it functions. They are usually a combination of philosophical and religious values that define how we work, play, love, buy, and sell. They define right and wrong, and form the basis of our laws and governmental policy. In short, these principles are our culture.

Businesses also have a culture, whether it has been formally defined by members of the organization, or it has defined itself. Too often, an owner despairs because "what it is" doesn't match up with "how it should be." Typically, this is because no one sat down to define the current reality or the ideals that describe who they are, where they are going, or how they will get there.

It's not surprising. Defining these values is hard, soul-baring, mind-bending work. It requires introspection, communication with partners and employees, and it usually creates some tension. But the result is always fulfilling. Decisions become clearer, actions smoother, and interactions with guests and employees are purer.

Many people write a mission statement and then stop. A mission is important, but how you accomplish your mission is just as important as the mission itself. You accomplish your mission by continually measuring everything you do against the values and principles that define your company culture.

For example, a restaurant client of mine was having a great deal of difficulty with a new manager. Complaints from employees, conflicts with other managers, and frustration from the owner were the symptoms. We sat down and looked closely at the new manager and the complaints, then at the core values that the group had agreed upon during a prior strategic planning session. It was clear that the new manager did not embody the organization's core values, and this was creating friction.

Once the problem was defined, the group knew more clearly what steps needed to be taken. They also learned a valuable lesson about hiring people who match the company's core values. By acting according to your values, you will achieve your mission and create success and profitability for your employees and stakeholders.

Keep my words positive...
Words become my behavior.

Keep my behaviors positive...
Behaviors become my habits.

Keep my habits positive...
Habits become my values.

Keep my values positive...
Values become my destiny.

This is no dress rehearsal...
This is one day in YOUR life.

~ Mahatma Gandhi
When should the Core Values Exercise be conducted?

The Core Values Exercise can be conducted in conjunction with a strategic planning session, or as a stand-alone exercise. As part of a larger strategic session, the core values defined by your team become integral to decisions about future initiatives and corporate goals. However, it serves as an excellent team- and morale-building exercise when completed at a management retreat or during a special corporate session.

Who should the lead the Core Values Exercise?

Ideally, the exercise is lead by an outside consultant or facilitator to allow all corporate team members to participate in the exercise. It may also be lead by a member of the Board of Directors, the company’s owner/CEO, etc.

Who should be involved in the Core Values Exercise?

A few examples of groups to consider: the board, key administrative or corporate staff members, restaurant managers, strategic branding/marketing consultants, and other stakeholders.

How much time should be allocated to the Core Values Exercise?

The time needed to complete the exercise depends in part on the number of participants. But allow at least 2 hours to complete the exercise and allow for plenty of discussion.

Values

The Sum of Life’s Choices

Values are the standards upon which important decisions are made...the how and what of decisions.
CORE VALUES EXERCISE
Getting Down to Business

Materials Needed:

✓ Copies of the "Defining Core Values" worksheet and "Values Into Behaviors" worksheet for all participants
✓ Flip chart and pens

The Process:

✓ Have each participant complete the "Defining Core Values" worksheet on his or her own. Allow 5 minutes.

✓ After everyone has chosen and ranked their three values, have them pair up. Each person should share their list of three values, and then each pair narrows their six values down to three, again ranking them in order of importance. Since many words on the list have similar meanings, encourage the group to carefully articulate their choices and listen to each other for areas of agreement. Allow 10 minutes.

✓ Next, pair two groups of two, then two groups of four, etc., having the participants negotiate their values lists down to three each time. As the groups increase in size, you may wish to appoint a spokesperson for each group in each round. Allow 20 minutes per round.

✓ At the end of the session, the groups will have narrowed the list into three agreed-upon values, ranked in order of importance to the group.

✓ Once the final three values are listed on the flipchart, divide everyone into three equal-sized groups. Each group takes a value and "behaviorizes" it using the "Values Into Behaviors" worksheet. The goal is to define what each value would look like in the company, and how it might impact the way everyone works together.

✓ Once the exercise is complete, memorialize the company's Core Values on a laminated card for all employees, a poster for the walls, the back of business cards, and in employee training materials. It is important to make the Core Values conspicuous throughout all levels of the organization, and to ensure that all strategic decisions and day-to-day actions are consistent with them.
Defining Core Values

The most important thing is life is to decide what is most important.

What should our organization stand for? What should be the values by which we operate? Read the list of values below. Circle any values that “jump out” because of their importance to you. Then write your top three values, in order of importance, below the list. Feel free to add values if needed.

Accountability  Flexibility  Power
Adventure       Freedom       Pragmatism
Affirmation     Friendship   Precision
Afordability    Fulfillment  Pride
Altruism        Fun           Profitability
Authenticity    Generosity   Progress
Belonging       Good Judgment  Prosperity
Candor          Growth       Punctuality
Caring          Happiness   Purposefulness
Clarity         Hard Work   Quality
Cleanliness     Health       Recognition
Cleverness      Honesty     Relationships
Collaboration   Honor       Reliability
Comfort        Humility     Resources
Commitment      Humor       Respect
Community      Inclusion   Responsibility
Competitiveness  Independence   Responsiveness
Connection      Individuality   Safety
Control        Influence   Security
Cooperation    Initiative   Self-Control
Courage        Innovation   Sense Of Urgency
Courtesy        Integrity   Service
Creativity      Irreverence  Simplicity
Customer Focus  Joy         Sincerity
Dependability  Justice     Spirituality
Diversity      Kindness     Stewardship
Education      Knowledge   Strength
Effectiveness  Learning   Success
Efficiency     Loyalty     Support
Empowerment    Nurturing   Teamwork
Entertainment  Optimism   Thoughtfulness
Enthusiasm    Order       Tolerance
Entrepreneurialism  Originality   Trust
Equity        Participation Value
Excellence     Partnership  Wealth
Excitement    Passion     Wisdom
Fairness      People       Work Ethic
Fame          Performance
Family        Persistence
Financial Growth Perspective

1. ___________________  2. ___________________  3. ___________________

Values Into Behaviors
Actions speak louder than words.

How should people at all levels of the organization exemplify the company's Core Values? What do Core Values look like on a daily basis? Brainstorm a specific example of how the following people/groups would act on our Core Values. For example, a server might exemplify the value of "teamwork" by volunteering to help a busy busser clean tables. A manager might exemplify the value "initiative" by researching a new food safety training program for the staff.

Front of the House: 

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Back of the House: 

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Office/Administrative: 

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Managers/Supervisors: 

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Leaders/Owners/Stockholders: 

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