Values

One shared value is worth a thousand rules

Everyone is 100% correct from his or her own frame of reference. If I think this is a beautiful day because the sun is shinning and there is a fresh breeze, I am right. If someone else says it is a terrible day because we are in a drought and we need moisture, that person is also right, also. The trouble is we are both right and we are confused by our disagreement.

There is a workshop exercise we use to bring this point home. After hearing a story about five fictitious characters in a problem situation, participants rank the individuals from the best to the worst. It is a forced choice decision so they cannot rank everybody good or everybody bad. They have to make a decision. Participants often ask what criteria to use for ranking the people and we tell them that is their decision. This part of the exercise is not too difficult.

In the next phase the team develops a team ranking. There are only two rules, no voting and don't change your numbers unless you can support it. The purpose of these rules is to focus attention on the reason behind the numbers, not the numbers themselves. A team may have four people with similar rankings, but when they hear the reason the fifth person sees it differently, they see things differently, too.

This phase is surprisingly difficult and time consuming. At the start, there is a general assumption that everyone heard the story the same way, made the same assumptions, and reached the same logical conclusions. In reality, there was a wide divergence over rankings based good and bad behavior. Most of the time the team reaches an agreement that they can all live with. Occasionally, we see a hung jury, but that is rare. Once all the team scores are posted we have a general group discussion that includes all the teams in the workshop. Even when a team agreed on the rankings, we have found there were still people who strongly held to their original opinions, even though they felt they could support the team decision.

When we ask participants what they learned from the exercise, we hear a variety of responses, but a general theme comes through:

- We did not all hear things the same way.
- Participant's decisions were based on their own values, and not everyone agreed on the underlying values.
- Assumptions had to be made because not all the facts were known.
- The reasons for a decision were as important as the decision itself.

There was no surprise there were differences of opinion, but the wide diversity and intensity of opinions was surprising to participants. This was made up story but the issues real and meaningful, based on people's values. Two of the characters in the story demonstrate the divergence of opinion. The first character avoids getting involved in other people's problems and he gets a high ranking for this. The second character takes the opposite approach and immediately jumps right into the middle of the problem and tries to fix it. He gets high rankings, too. Both of these characters also get very low rankings from different people on the team. If

you value participation, you will rank the second character high and first low. If you value minding your own business, the scores are flip-flopped. Within a particular team, we generally see both opinions.

Values run deep. People will die for their values. You cannot just look at people and see what their values are. We are not in full agreement on our values, even if we are basically nice people and want to do a good job. When participants see what is going on, they pause and think. There is more than what meets the eye. On the surface people have reasons for doing what they do and these reasons make sense. Underneath there is another set of reasons that are much more powerful and harder to articulate. Sometime we don't even understand them ourselves.

The values we carry inside are the sum total of our life experiences. For example, people who have grown up in tough economic times value money and credit differently from those from those whose formative years were during boom economic times. Morris Massey, in his book, *People Puzzle*, asks, "Where you were when you were ten?" What was going on the world around you, formed your values and you will probably live them for the rest of your life. They rarely change unless there is a *significant emotional event.* It is impossible to predict what that event might be, but you know when it happens. It could be the birth of a child, the passing of a loved one or a personal challenge. When a significant emotional event happens, you reevaluate your values because you suddenly see things differently. Regardless of when your values were formed, they drive your behavior, and other people's values drive their behavior.

When we talk about forming high performance teams, we suggest you recruit multiple personality types and encourage people to do well what they do well. You do not want everyone from the same mold. You might have noticed that opposites attract because we meet each other's needs that way. When it comes to values, we look at it differently, like attracts like. For example, let's look at a work value, quality. People who value high quality work attract others who feel the same way. Some people value getting the job done early and they like to work with others who feel the same way. When values are in conflict, we feel uncomfortable with one-another. When values are way out of sync, they can cause us to experience personal distress. This distress will often lead to quitting the job, because staying is unthinkable. Picture yourself with an organization that values profit over honesty and you are expected to be dishonest with the rest of them. What would you do? Even though you have a good paycheck, how would you really feel when you put that money in the bank?

Values are far more powerful than we might imagine. They drive our decisions and formulate our self-worth. It is difficult to determine another person's values. As we work with people their values show up in their actions. It is true, actions speak louder than words. When we have shared values, we are equally passionate about the job and we can handle differences of style. When we don't have shared values, everything becomes difficult.

How can we use values at work in a positive way? If you take the time discuss and agree on team core values, you have something that pulls the team together and drives positive behavior. It is worth the effort to get the values down in writing and display them so they stay visible. For example, at the Great Harvest Bread Co.® in Bloomington, Illinois, painted in big colorful letters on the wall are the following values:

- Be loose and have fun
- Bake phenomenal bread
- Run fast to help customers
- Give generously to others

In our research, we found out that this company does not have prescribed recipes for bakery franchise to use. Instead, they state the value "bake phenomenal bread," and that drives the behavior. If there were a rule about prescribed recipe and customers did not like the bread, the bakery might blame the customers rather than the recipe. When the value is to make the bread phenomenal, we will modify the recipe to put a smile on the face of the customer.

Once you put your values in writing, you better live them or be prepared to be seen as a phony. You would be talking without walking the talk. In one of our workshops when used the Great Harvest Bread Co.® value statements as an example, one of the participants reported that he asked the bakery of for a contribution to a local charity, and the bakery did more than make a contribution. They offered the day's profits if the charity would come and work the counter that day. This bakery walked the walk. Instead of choosing a corporate cause, each franchise is free to help the local organizations within the community. Even struggling bakeries find that while it costs money to do things that matter in the community, the rewards abound. (www.winningworkplaces.org/library/success.php?sid=9)

In our workshops, participants write four value statements for their teams. We have found it is very effective to use one-word statements like, communications, honest or quality because these words are very broad in meaning. It is important for the team to define what they mean For example, one team defined communications as, "a friendly greeting, be spontaneous, and don't avoid unpleasant stuff." We then ask participants the go the step and write memorable value statement like the ones at Great Harvest®. For example, one team said they valued a pleasant work place. Their statement turned out to be, "Have fun getting the job done." Note that they carefully constructed this so it was not just about having fun, it was about getting work done, and having fun at the same time. Anther team valued quality. They defined quality as conformance to requirements, no returns, and no rework. Their value statement was, "Doing it right saves time and the customer comes back for more." Notice how these value statements can drive behavior without the necessity for lots of rules. Furthermore, people feel good about it. This is how companies can develop work teams that exceed expectations.

Let's turn our attention to business ethics. Now that we understand the power and complexity of values, it is good to take it one more step. We pointed out that people do not automatically share values, but when personal values are in sync, it pulls people together and the work place is more productive. We have not taken a stand on what the shared values should be and how to enforce corporate values. Let's do that now.

First, you must always comply with the law. Any breaking of the law cannot be tolerated. It can bring down the entire company. Immediate discipline is essential when the law is broken.

Many professions have a code of ethics. Medical doctors trace their code back to, Hippocrates of ancient Greece. The profession enforces the code of ethics so that it has meaning and the general

public feels confident when working with medical providers. Does your profession have a code of ethics? If yes, it essential that your company enforce it.

These first two examples are pretty clear. From here on out, it gets more complex. An informal code of ethics for some sales people is, "sell the chump a lump." Lacking a professional code, could you define a code of ethics for your sales people, a code the you would publish and enforce? You could apply this thought process to just about any business situation. The key is to consider everything you do to be public information and ask yourself if you would like to read about it on the front page of the newspaper. Violating professional ethics has brought down large corporations.

Once you start on the journey of defining values and enforcing them, the world opens up in a new way. You no longer need lots of rules because people are accountable against a clear set of values. With rules, people look for ways to get around them. With values, people look for ways to act consistently with the values. You still need some rules, but they are not the driving force. The rules take care of themselves when they are generated from the values and support the values.

As a final thought, let's look at consistency of values across the corporation. Consistency does not mean identical. If the delivery department values speed and the production department values quality, they are both consistent with the corporate value of, "deliver what the customer ordered, when the customer expects it." Both departments developed their own specific values that look different but still support the overall corporate values. Look at what happens when you are out of sync with corporate values. If a department values cutting cost and they succeed, but lose clients, they fail to meet the corporate value that is centered on the customer.

It may not be easy to get values defined and consistent across the organization. In the short run this can take time and be a real struggle. You probably won't get it right the first time. You have to grow into it. In the long run, the shared values will drive the organization's behavior, taking you where you want to go. You want results that you will be proud of for a long time to come.