

Corporate Values

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How to Turn Company Values Into Shared Employee Beliefs

Find out how to get your employees to embody the values you want your company to stand for.



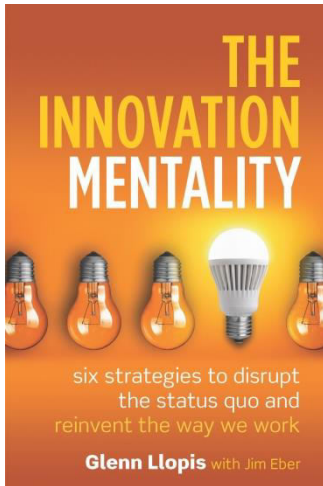
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Nurturing shared corporate values to support and protect long-term success requires vigilance and constant attention from leadership at all levels. Reading the corporate values and mission statements of countless organizations -- which often say things like “We respect individuals” or “Our people and our customers are our point of difference” or “We value and strive for diversity and inclusion” -- you would think their leadership gets this. But my research shows otherwise. The very individuals these businesses supposedly respect -- and whose diversity companies want to value -- often don't share belief in those stated corporate values and missions.

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This sense of alienation is especially felt among millennials and those shift populations represented by the cultural demographic shift. According to my organization's study of Hispanic leadership, only 20 percent of the workplace and corporate values that matter most to Hispanics are represented, authentically applied and lived in Fortune 500 companies. According to a 2015 Gallup Poll of more than 80,000 U.S. employees, more than two-thirds reported being disengaged or actively disengaged (i.e., not “involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace”) with millennials being the least engaged demographic group (only a quarter of them report being engaged) and “traditionalist” executives being the most. *Harvard Business Review* estimates the annual cost of this disengagement is at least \$450 billion.

And it's not like companies haven't noticed: Disconnect between the values and missions on paper and the reality experienced in the workplace is of utmost concern at

the companies I work with. For example, I consulted with a Fortune 500 company that wanted to get back on track with Latino populations outside the U.S. It felt it had “lost mindset” with those populations and needed a change. Looking at its corporate values, you would not have thought this possible: Everything about this company on paper screamed, “Evolved!” Reading through its mission statement and supporting materials, I thought this company’s leaders had gotten a copy of my manuscript and drawn on the six characteristics the way they used the word “innovative,” talked about winning mindset and expressed willingness to engage and embrace failure and learning in its leadership.

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It’s unbelievable how organizations are thinking this way ... at least on paper. But what happens beyond the words of your corporate values? What would happen if your people were empowered to challenge them and encouraged to influence them?

This is why corporate values are usually about substitution. But simply substituting more inclusive and evolved words every few years and never challenging anyone to do the evolved thinking needed to live those values does not lead to evolution. It leads to more substituting with more evolved window dressing. In fact, despite sounding evolved, the values of that company I just mentioned were not new. They were written well over a decade ago for a workplace and marketplace that has experienced much change and evolution just in terms of technology and global competition as well as people. No wonder the workplace was disengaged and the marketplace had passed the company by. Few at the company shared in the beliefs that defined those values, including its leadership!

When was the last time your corporate values were challenged? How and how often are they revised? What is the revision process? Have you discussed, listened to and

thought about what your corporate values mean to individuals in the workplace and marketplace, and how they'll live them? Probably not. So many companies struggle to live their values internally and externally despite all the wonderful words used to create them.

Corporate values are about attitude; shared beliefs are about mindset. It's the difference between doing (sowing) and thinking. Mindset is about refusing to be bound by legacies and seeing the opportunity to make the brand stronger. Mindset is about sharing to gain buy-in across departments and colleagues that alter the mentality of how we are engaged and motivated to perform and, in turn, get our customers to buy. That's why this Fortune 500 company I just described was right about "losing mindset with Latino populations." It just didn't see that the lost mindset could be traced back to lost opportunity in its workplace. Its seemingly enlightened corporate values were just an attitude captured on paper, not integrated with a generous purpose into shared beliefs in the work its people were doing. It had failed to achieve this mindset and lost sight of its amazing values because senior leadership fought the evolution out of fear it would expose their insecurities about how little they understood what needed to be done and their inability to lead through change.

To succeed fully and for the long term, your organization must do the thinking and have the mindset to *see opportunity* in evolving its *corporate values* and *working with a generous purpose* to turn them into *shared beliefs*.

To bring these values to life and evolve them into shared beliefs, you must get past the fear, as well as hierarchy, ego, envy and politicking, to see the opportunity that the values represent for the business and the situation at hand. That's how an organization truly understands where the gaps exist in each stated corporate value and takes the initial steps to provide greater clarity and understanding for every individual. Only then will individuals truly see themselves in the values and thus see opportunities previously unseen.

Don't let your people see only what the company tells them to see. To have people evolve, you must work with a generous purpose and promote the spirit of giving and sharing and compel individuals to see what they're missing. That means having the best interests of your people at heart. Move away from making people see the values that define the organization as inherently valuable and automatically shared.

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Instead, re-educate yourself by valuing your people as individuals as often as possible. Establish trust and transparency by re-educating the team about the role that the values play and where they're created. Use your generous purpose to create pathways for others to express their points of view so that in the end, their shared beliefs bring the fires of empowerment to life in an authentic way. Shared beliefs belong to everyone, and a truly inclusive process is the best way to have an authentically inclusive outcome from bottom to top -- from the people in the stores and the cubicles on the ground floor to the corner offices at the top. Let everyone shape those values to share in their beliefs. Shared beliefs are two-way streets that place a premium on commitment, not just compliance.

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