

corporate culture



By Joseph Atteridge

THE VALUE OF VALUES

According to recent surveys by the Gallup Organization, 70 percent of employees are not engaged in today's organizations. Why? Have we not spent enough on employee programs and training? Don't they understand where we are going? Why the lack of commitment?

Further research indicates a strong correlation between the degree of an employee's commitment/engagement and how strongly their personal values match the company's values.

Yet, like me, most leaders gloss over those values and focus on either the vision or next quarter's objectives.

You might be thinking that it is obvious that values play an important role in culture. So what? Well, let's take a minute to define culture. It is the shared beliefs that drive the attitude, thinking and behaviors of a group. Simple enough, right?

NOT SO OBVIOUS VALUES

Over my career I have read many business books on subjects such as leadership, continuous improvement or quality programs, and reengineering.

Many of these books mention values as an important aspect of the leadership mix. However, I just took the term for granted and never really explored the subject.

After all, the organization I was working for at the time had a set of values and they appeared on many posters throughout our facilities. So what else could there be? Everyone certainly knew what they meant, as they were as common in our understanding as motherhood and apple pie.

Those values were respect, service, accountability, integrity and excellence.

Values certainly seemed to be secondary to vision and maybe even to strategy.

But I came to learn the tremendous power they have for an organization that really uses them. In fact, values more than anything else drive the culture of the company. They are indeed the benchmark by which leadership is measured and the glue that keeps the employees committed to the firm.

I would like you to really stop and think about the attitudes and behaviors of your employees. Do you know? What impact do you think attitudes and behaviors have on customer service, teamwork, or productivity? Are those areas your company could improve on?

What are the beliefs that drive the attitudes,

thinking and behaviors of your team? Better yet, who sets those beliefs? You and your leadership team or the people that have been there for years?

DEFINING YOUR VALUES

Beliefs are an outcome of the values you espouse, but you probably haven't really defined what you mean by those values. That is critical.

In defining values, we often tend to describe what we mean by the word as that seems only logical. However, values are really only recognized in the behaviors we see others exhibit. If we see someone behaving in a way that makes us think they are being accountable, we believe they are living in accordance with that value. So, it becomes essential that we define the value in terms of the expected behaviors.

Certainly you and your leadership team could do this. But for the average employee this will look like and sound like a forced march. Far better the majority of the employees determine what behaviors represent the values for the company because that forms their commitment to them.

Note here that I have said they should determine the behaviors associated with the values, but not the values themselves. That is your job!! You and your leadership team need to decide what the values are that will help you achieve your vision.

ENERGIZING WORKERS

This approach to values allows you and your employees to jointly build the attitudes, thinking and behaviors that will get you to your vision.

It energizes your team and makes them accountable. It increases their level of engagement to the organization and its goals. It also forms the basis for a new methodology in performance measurement for your leaders, managers and supervisors.

In other words, this provides the foundation for "walking the talk!" You will now have very clear and precise descriptions of the behaviors that leaders should model and you can measure them to provide feedback in the leadership development process.

Values become the driving force of a constructive culture. That means increased accountability, satisfaction and profitability.

Are you getting that value from your values?

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Having employees define the behaviors required to fulfill a set of corporate values can energize a workforce.