

# **CORE VALUES EXERCISE**

# CORE VALUES

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## **WHY ARE CORE VALUES IMPORTANT?**

Your Core Values guide the important decisions: who you hire, when you fire, what building you buy, what service you provide. They are the foundations of all the other language your company uses. They are reflected in your name and visual identity. At least, they should. They literally define you.

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## **WHAT ARE CORE VALUES?**

Core Values are inherent. They are there. They can't be manufactured, they can be uncovered. A core value is something that makes an organization distinct. It is something the organization wouldn't abandon for financial benefit.

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## **WHAT AREN'T?**

Other sorts of values get in the way of uncovering core values. Permission-to-play values are one kind. They are minimum standards of conduct. Things like honesty and integrity are important for any company. They are only true values if the company adheres to them in a particular or extreme way. These will be default answers you should interrogate.

Aspirational values are another. This is what the company isn't, but wants to be. Including aspirational values can be toxic to the culture of the organization. It is valuable to have aspirations, but this isn't the place for them.

# EXERCISE

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## PROCESS

Note: this is a little better in person but can translate to virtual meetings. The important part is that everyone is present, and if at all possible, visible. Any key decision-maker in the company should participate. This would certainly include any leadership team. If the organization is large, a sampling of people at all levels can provide the clearest snapshot.

It is best to designate two people to run the exercise. One, the leader, will facilitate and answer questions. The other, the scribe, will document and help with logistics. If virtual, the scribe needs to present the notetaking document for group discussion.

1. Get out 5 sticky notes. If virtual, a blank sheet of paper will do. Picture in your mind the ideal employee of your company. It could be someone who currently works there, or could be a hypothetical person. Write down 5 words or phrases you would use to describe them.
  - a. Take the sticky notes and put them on a wall or whiteboard. If virtual, the scribe should type them on the shared screen as each participant shares their values.
2. Get 5 more notes (or find a new space on your paper). This time think about yourself. What is something you express at work that makes you different from other people? Are you driven, relaxed? Are you social or introverted? These should be true things that others could affirm.
  - a. Repeat sharing and documenting your answers.
3. Get 5 last notes (or blank space on your paper). This time think of what you would want your best customer to say about you. How would they describe your organization?
  - a. Share and document your answers.
4. The leader should facilitate a group discussion to sort all generated answers into affinity groupings. You may want to label each group. Document the columns with a photo before moving on.

# EXERCISE

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## FINALIZING

There likely won't be time or energy to finalize the list in the meeting. It is possible to narrow things, though. Sort the notes with the help of the group into three categories:

1. Keep. These feel spot-on. Put any relevant note into this column.
2. Kill. These are likely either Permission to Play Values or Aspirational Values. Set them aside.
3. Combine. There will be some ideas restated in similar ways. Combine these in the Keep category.

The goal is to take these words and summarize them into less than ten values. They can be single words. They can be phrases. They can be word pairs with a sentence descriptor. The important thing is that the final product sounds and feels like your organization.

Before concluding, set clear next steps for finalizing and sharing the values.

# EXAMPLES

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## **THE CONTAINER STORE**

1. 1 Great Person = 3 Good People
  2. Communication IS Leadership
  3. Fill the other guy's basket to the brim. Making money then becomes an easy proposition.
  4. The Best Selection, Service & Price
  5. Intuition does not come to an unprepared mind. You need to train before it happens.
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## **ZAPPOS**

1. Deliver WOW Through Service
2. Embrace and Drive Change
3. Create Fun and A Little Weirdness
4. Be Adventurous, Creative, and Open-Minded
5. Pursue Growth and Learning
6. Build Open and Honest Relationships With Communication
7. Build a Positive Team and Family Spirit
8. Do More With Less
9. Be Passionate and Determined
10. Be Humble

# EXAMPLES

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## BULLHORN

### Empathy and Honesty

- + We care about each other. The fact is that our work is one of the main ways we will spend our time. That time should be productive. It should mean something.
- + And we are honest because it deepens trust and makes way for better empathy. Among ourselves, with our clients. And, ultimately, it creates better work.

### Dissatisfaction and Improvement

- + We care about the broken things. The inconsistencies, the ugly things, the things that cause friction. We notice.
- + They fuel our urge for improvement. We are the princess who feels the damn pea under all those mattresses and has to get up to do something about it.

### Creativity and Decisiveness

- + We care about cultivating creativity. Here, you are expected to bring your full creative capacity to bear on whatever task you face.
- + And you must make a choice. Put it out there. Make another. And another. Iterate. Be willing to look simple. Stupid. The true enemy of creativity is indecision.

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