

# Core Values Exercise

If you have not taken some time to establish your values, or if they fall short of serving as a compass, here is an exercise your team can use to develop them. Done with honesty and discernment, they feel intrinsic, like an articulation of what was true, and what will be true in the future—whatever that may bring.

## 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.

## What are core values?

Core Value 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.

## What aren't?

Other sorts of values get in the way of uncovering core values. Permission to play values are one. 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 some sort extreme way. These will be default answers you have to question.

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

# Core Values Exercise

## Process

Note: this is a little better in person but each step has variants for virtual meetings. Any key decision maker in the company should be present for this meeting. 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 have two people running the exercise. One to lead and answer questions. The other person documents and helps with logistics.

1. Get out 5 sticky notes. 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.

Take the sticky notes and put them on a wall or white board. If virtual, have a doc on the screen and type them as people give their values.

2. Get 5 more notes. 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.

While the client is working on this you can be arranging the sticky notes from the first exercise into columns of similar ideas.

3. Get 5 last notes. This time think of what you would want your best customer to say about you. How would they describe your organization?

Add the new ones when completed. Put them into columns. Document the columns with a photo before moving on.

## Finalize

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.

# Core Values Examples



## Zappos' Core Values

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

## The Container Store®

### The Container Store's Core Values

1 Great Person = 3 Good People

Communication IS Leadership

Fill the other guy's basket to the brim. Making money then becomes an easy proposition.

The Best Selection, Service & Price

Intuition does not come to an unprepared mind. You need to train before it happens.

# Our Core Values

## 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.