



What Matters Most in Your World?

As a business leader, the quick answer to what matters most might be “profit”, for surely your business cannot continue to exist without it. But why else are you in business? Why are you in *this* business? What motivates you? Inspires you? I would contend, that not only does it matter *how* you make money, but that doing so in alignment with your values can actually build financial longevity for your firm – and professional and personal satisfaction in the process.

Core values – we see them hanging on the walls in companies’ entryways, we see them posted on websites, backs of business cards, in proposals and in employee manuals. We see themes in which values are trending; when innovation, sustainability or (insert 2013’s hot topic), is the hip and cool value to tout. The culture of the business world is both more skeptical and more transparent than ever. We don’t trust the message just because you’ve done an amazing job defining your brand. We want to know if it’s *genuine*. *Is it the real deal?* Can we trust it?

Consider this scenario. A long-standing Portland based general contractor had walked through an intensive exercise to define its vision, mission and values. They developed their positioning statement that would be publicized on all the jobsites, hardhats, trucks, business cards, etc. This particular CEO was passionate about integrating the developed core values into every facet of the business. He understood that to make it meaningful and valuable, people had to walk the talk. One of their core values was “respect.”

It soon became apparent that a talented and highly effective superintendent (*consistently met all project objectives*), was in continual violation of this core value as it related to his interactions with subcontractors. The superintendent was not going to embrace this core value. The CEO had to decide – do I ignore this core value violation by allowing (ignoring) this attitude and behavior, or do I stop tolerating it? After numerous attempts to train and coach the superintendent of what it meant to demonstrate respect to all project team members, and after several warnings, the CEO fired his star performer. He understood that if he tolerated such non-compliance with a supposed core value, the values he professed were meaningless. *By the way, this firm continues to be highly respected and successful.*

The Power of Core Values in Business

The responsibility to generate the company’s vision and direction resides primarily at the top of the organization; as do the points of differentiation from your competition, and the very culture



in which your team operates. Carving out some time to understand exactly what matters most to you - what drives you - will help you create alignment and synergy within your organization.

Values are what you believe to be important in the way you live and work. They should determine your priorities, and thus, the allocation of your resources of time, money and energy. Think of values as your internal compass, a critical tool for finding one's way when things get messy or one gets lost in a tumultuous business climate.

Values also serve businesses as a tool for setting goals. They should set you in the direction of your dreams. *"When we are doing what is right for us, the psyche provides enthusiasm and energy to support our investment in life."* - What Matters Most – Living a More Considered Life, James Hollis. On a daily basis, when one is clear and committed to one's values, they serve as an invaluable guide in making decisions.

Equally important, when an organization truly integrates its values in everyday practice, there's a byproduct of attracting similarly valued employees, clients, and colleagues. When our attitudes, beliefs, choices and actions are congruent, we experience a sense of peace and satisfaction. That level of integrity is no small reward as we navigate the demands and complexities of business.

The Cost & Consequences of Disconnects

Alternatively, when our words and actions are out of alignment with our core values, we risk damaging our credibility and reputation. If the experience of your company isn't what your marketing proclaims it to be, people will trust what they experience, not what they are told. On an internal level, your organization could suffer from a malfunctioning internal compass. Ailments such as inefficiencies and distrust can seep in, as employees are unclear what should drive their choices and behaviors.

Take the K Communications Challenge:

- 1. Define what matters most to you.** Look at times when you felt most fulfilled, proud or happiest. What experience were you having? How were you showing up? Explore this on a personal and professional level. (Visit www.values.com for inspiration).
- 2. Do a values "check-in".** How well are you and your team living them? Where are you excelling and where are you out of alignment? Do you have values that are contradictory, and if so, how do you reconcile them?
- 3. How/where can you raise the awareness of your team for better integration?** How can you lead the way by walking the talk? Ignite the conversation with your team. Help them embody what truly defines your organization.



Don't let what matters most, be at the mercy of what's most convenient, popular, or pressing. Gain confidence and clarity in your leadership through identifying and aligning with your values. You'll experience the integrity and power of living from the core and your organization will reap the rewards.

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