

## **How to Create Shared Values That Guide Your Team to Greater Heights**

Change does not have to begin at the top of an organization

Values are beliefs about what is fundamentally important. They affect your decision making and your behaviors, whether you are conscious of them or not. Your real values are reflected by your behavior, and if your espoused values are not consistent with your behavior, you will lose credibility and trust.

The same is true for teams. When a team identifies and commits to living shared values, there is a deeper level of trust, better problem-solving, and increased collaboration.

Team values are more than just a collection of the values of individual team members. Team values are reflected by the general pattern of behaviors of team members. They might not be explicitly stated, but it is possible to observe the general norms of behaviors to tell what the values are. Are people respectful toward each other? Do they push boundaries, or are they conventional? Do they avoid conflict, or is conflict surfaced and addressed?

Team values and purpose

To be most effective, team values should be consistent with the personal values of the team members and also the purpose of the team. For example, if you are an accounting department and see your team purpose as collecting and organizing financial information, *partnering* or *collaborating* with others won't be as important as being accurate and dependable. On the other hand, if you see your team purpose as "providing information and advice to guide leaders in wise financial decision making," then *partnering and collaborating* with business leaders will be essential for your team's success.

## Team values and company values

It's important to consider how your team values support the purpose or mission of your company. For example, if your company operates a cruise line, *safety* and *entertainment* are likely to be core values. The accounting department will need to consider how these values translate to their own department. *Safety* might translate to fiscal responsibility. Some values like *entertainment* might not translate to a core team value, which is fine. However, even if it is not a driving value for your team, it must still be respected, or conflict will arise.

If your company hasn't articulated values, don't wait

Consider your sphere of influence, and within that sphere, work with your team to identify your team's values. As your team consistently lives its shared values, those who are impacted will notice, and interest and energy will spread. At the very least, you will have strengthened your own team. And you might be pleasantly surprised to discover that others will begin to change as well, because change does not have to begin at the top of an organization.

## Seven guidelines to create shared values

- 1. Don't assume that any values are simply "understood."** If you think something is already understood, it needs to be named as an important core value. If some form of *integrity* or *ethical behavior* is not identified as a core value, you will eventually find yourself in a downward spiral.
- 2. Involve your team in identifying the values.** You can't impose values on others. When you surface the values that your team cares deeply about, they will commit to living them.
- 3. Don't make a laundry list.** Focus on the shared values that are the key drivers to fulfill your team's purpose. There are usually only three to five core team values. You don't need to include each individual's personal values, as long as there are no values conflicts.

4. **Translate the values into observable behaviors.** Providing behavioral examples helps your team understand what the values look like when they are being lived.
5. **As a leader, model the values consistently.** People watch what you do more closely than they listen to what you say.
6. **Integrate your stated values into your daily processes and practices.** Refer to your values when it's time to make an important decision. Talk frequently about how they are reflected in your daily work. They will not be effective if they are seen as something extra or "soft."
7. **Don't ignore a values breach.** If a core value has been violated, address it immediately. No one is exempt. Too often bad behavior of "high performers" is ignored, which in the long run undermines your entire team.

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