Culture Blueprint: Core Values

Quick Summary: Establishing a clear mission, vision, and set of core values for your business establishes the purpose, goals, and method of operation. These foundational elements already drive your organization, whether you know it or not.

The mission. To know your real mission, you must know what game you are playing, what business you are really in, and what business you need to be in.

The vision. While imagined, the vision is meant to become real and should be attainable within a specific time frame (2-5 years). Your vision statement should be short, simple, easy to remember, and most of all, inspiring.

The core values. These are the key components to building an organization that lasts beyond its visionary charismatic founders. They convey what is considered of higher importance than anything else in any organization. Core values provide a decision-making framework and establish clear boundaries to maintain order. By having core values, members of an organization commit to the experience that drive results, rather than to the results themselves. Values outlive goals, trends, strategies, even people.

Setting expectations of high integrity lets everyone know how serious the company is about these core values. This allows the system to stay resilient but faithful to the original intentions of the core values. To test whether a company is really living by its values, the organization's leadership has to live them, the company hires by them and fires by them, and the values are used as a decision-making criteria.

Now, to put these core values into action, an organization has to 1) set a standard, 2) make a bold promise to both their customers and to their people, and 3) deliver that promise regardless of market conditions.

Types of values:

The following are the types of values used in both working with companies on their values and in analyzing the values of very successful companies:

1. **Key Differentiator Values** distinguish one company from the other, and also help them lead the field.

2. **Supporting Values** are supportive of the vision and the key differentiator

3. **Experience Values** guide what kind of experience a company would like to have, regardless of the state of the business.

4. **Über Values** must be present for the other values to work. They include integrity, willingness, and relevance.

5. **Defensive Values.** Are included to be proactive against potential threats to the business.

Before creating core values, the following must be considered:

❖ The causes of the value and the necessary beliefs
❖ The consequences of the value
❖ The evidence that the value is in action

Optimization in a culture is all about selecting the value that lead to other values. However, this comes with trade-offs. For example, a high-service organization requires a lot of energy as well as a very social and outgoing group. If you're shy and unsocial, you won't do well there.

Once those values are set, the resulting behaviors and actions create a positive feedback loop that further solidifies and reinforces the values.

The Core Value Discovery Formula:

Now keep in mind that discovering and creating values is not something that gets done and wrapped up in a weekend. Why? Because you're going to commit to these values for life. (The Zappos core values have never changed.)

1. **Commit to running a core values-based company.** This first step is vital. This is the commitment to running the company to a standard that goes beyond goals, people, investors, and profits.

2. **Determine your personal values.** It can be surprisingly hard, but it's important to know what you, as a leader, consider most important. Your own core values do not have to be the same as the company's, but they must be in alignment.

3. **Determine key people's personal values.** Think about the people who fully embody the culture you desire. Think about the values they embody, and also ask them what they believe their values are.

4. **Combine the discovered values.** Notice the trends, see what words can be combined. Come up with a list of thirty or less.

5. **Test the values.** Ask managers to see if those values are in alignment with those of their best employees or ex-employees.

6. **Test your commitment.** Are you willing to hire and fire based on whether an employee fits these core values? Would you hire a culture non-fit for a shortterm gain?

7. **Send the list to the entire company and ask for feedback.** Please don't use a committee to make the final decision. Also remember, you can't make everyone happy, and that's a good thing. Think about what delivery method will be most impactful and persuasive, whether it is an email or a company-wide meeting.

8. **Change the list to uniquely worded values.** When creating unique values, try to make them statements instead of just single words (e.g., "Deliver WOW! Through Service" and "Build a Positive Team and Family Spirit.") Take the words that you have chosen, and write down what they mean to you. Choose words that would inspire you to get up every morning. Start with verbs, so that you put them into action. Limit the total to ten or less.

9. **Roll out the values to the entire company.** Making the big announcement about your new values is crucial. There are many ways you can disseminate

information, whether it is through emails, individual team meetings, or a company quarterly meeting. The point is that you should be showing a public commitment, and not just once but often, on an ongoing basis.

10. **Integrate the core values into everything you do.** Take a look at your processes, one by one, to see how you can integrate your core values. Crowd-source this step of the process so that each department comes up with ideas. Don't overwhelm your teams by doing it all at once – start small if needed.

Keep in mind:

The "**Why?**" is your mission.
The "**What?**" is your vision.
The "**How?**" are your values.

Aligning core values:

✓ **Share them.** This can be done by consistently talking about your core values and getting them into every touch point with your employees and customers.

✓ **Create a feedback mechanism.** Open up channels for people to ask questions and provide ideas.

✓ **Teach them.** The fastest way to learn is to teach someone else to understand or do something.

✓ **Empower departments and subcultures.** Understand that teams and departments each have different styles, so you can let them operate in their own preferred way.

✓ **Evaluate them.** How can values be the criteria by which you evaluate the success of your people?

✓ **When in doubt, start a conversation.** This is best done in a triad as it helps build the relationship between two other people. Let the value itself become the trigger here. That way, it will not be about personal dislikes or politics, but about the values to which all are committed.

Laying the foundation	We need help	In the queue	In Progress	All set
1. Mission for the company We know what business we are really in today We know the business we need to be in tomorrow We understand the core purpose of our business				
2. Vision for the company Our vision is attainable within a set time frame Our vision simple and easy to remember Our vision is truly inspiring				
3. Core values for the company We have core values that convey what's important We make important decisions based on our values We set and meet high expectations around values				
4. Optimizing and aligning core values We have linked values to our mission and vision We are aligning core values within the company We have open communication around our values				