

THE ONE THING THAT'S DRIVING PEOPLE TO  
LEAVE YOUR ORGANIZATION



CORE  
VALUES

## A ROADMAP FOR ESTABLISHING CORE VALUES THAT MATTER

Retaining your top performers is essential to the stability of your organization and your revenue goals. If you're experiencing high turnover and under-performance, there's no better time than right now to determine how you can right the course and prevent further challenges. The solution may be more than skin deep, however.

One of the most often overlooked components to retaining your top performers is cross-functional alignment on your organization's core values.

## What are Core Values?

Many people talk about core values, but rarely do they define what they are. We liken core values to the ligaments of an organization. Core values are those things that hold us together in a coordinated way – they support an organization's mission and purpose and provide an organization a directional true north. So often in organizations, the bulk of focus and attention is on building the “muscles” – how we build the financial muscle, the sales muscle, the product muscle, etc. . . . But, if the muscle groups aren't supported by strong, healthy ligaments, all the weight lifting in the world won't help.

Core values give your team knowledge and strength by powering what you do to the bigger purpose behind it. They are what your team leans on when the going gets tough and view ahead grows hazy. If you are not intentionally cultivating your values consistently, you are unintentionally cultivating confusion, disengagement, and underperformance.

That said, we rarely sit in a room with a retention problem and think, “Hey, we need to determine our core values.” That's because it's difficult to see the connection. Core values are intangible at the start and we aren't trained to build them like we have been trained in the disciplines of finance, strategy, and sales. However, core values are critical components to organizational effectiveness. If you don't give them the time they warrant, you'll find yourself dealing with an organizational cancer that if left unchecked, will erode value from the inside out.

### How Do You Know Your Core Values Need Attention?

Here are two strong indicators that should have you rethinking your organization's approach to its core values.

#### 1. The environment is toxic.

You have a team of people who are jaded, negative, and frustrated. They feel like they can't do their jobs effectively, and cynicism, low morale, and lack of collaboration and initiative are pervasive. The good performers have long left and leadership struggles to get the average performers to do more than the minimum required on any regular basis.

#### 2. People are discouraged.

Your team members feel like everyone is moving in a hundred different directions, and it's not clear (1) what they're

supposed to be doing and (2) why they should be doing it. They don't think that what they're doing is making a real impact even though they may feel like they do their jobs well.

They may like the people they work with, but they feel disconnected or hypocritical from the overall company mission. This misalignment costs us organizational energy, focus, and strength.

### The Value of Building Core Value Alignment

Core values hold the alignment of organizations together, and the health of your values alignment is a litmus indicator for your ability to sustainably execute on strategy. Your culture and your core values will eventually override strategy every time. They help guide your decision making criteria around hard organizational decisions. They guide you in determining what organizational activities should warrant time and investment of resources.

So how do you build core value alignment? Here are three steps to help you get there:

### The Roadmap to Success

#### Provide the How

Don't just tell your team members what your values are and then expect them to execute on them. You have to provide the how. Operationalize core values by defining what they look like in action. It's not easy, but it's necessary. Give people the vision of what it looks like to get it right. It doesn't mean that you need to be prescriptive about every situation, but providing examples of what you mean by core value execution gives people direction to move them forward in their own operating rhythms.

For example, let's say that one of your core values is honor. You say your organization believes in honor – you honor your clients and your colleagues. Well, that's great to say, but what does it mean? Well if you wanted to operationalize that core value, you could say that preparation is a way to demonstrate that value. You show “honor” by coming prepared to client meetings, being proactive and not waiting for people to ask when you see a client need.

## Instill a Leadership Mindset

In order to “walk the talk,” we need to approach our core values with a leadership mindset. As leaders, it’s important to demonstrate the discipline that affects change by taking a hard look at our own “say-do” gaps and working hard to eradicate our own inconsistencies. Second, we have to be committed to the long haul, recognizing that the work of cultivating values is never done. This requires a shift in thinking, particularly for successful leaders who are often focused on results and being able to check things off, in order to move on to the next project.

Leaders are critical to helping the organization stay disciplined to the small activities, the mundane practices that drive effectiveness. Practice is the hard part of learning. Training and the rigor of repetition is the essence of transformation. It’s doing the little things right all the time, so you’re ready to do the big things right at the critical time.

**It’s not glamorous, but it’s essential.**

## Develop the Right Relationship with Time

The biggest challenge for an organization is often managing the time required to build a core values foundation. Time is the biggest impediment to really doing the hard work and building a groundwork that drives alignment when so many other things call out for our immediate attention. Yet, as with anything in our day-to-day activities, we will make the time for the things that we truly value. So how do you make the time, and more importantly, get organizational buy-in that you need to build a core value initiative?

## Work backwards and demonstrate its value.

### Ask yourself these key questions:

- What is it costing in productivity and loss of top talent to not take action?
- What are we missing by not developing a process that allows valuable team members to spend their time on high-value activities?
- What do we stand to gain by harnessing our time to drive effectiveness across the organization?

If you don’t know your values, it’s impossible to build a plan to live and demonstrate them. If you know them, but don’t live them, you will erode trust and authenticity - with colleagues and with clients. That’s when you’ll have coveted team members walking out the door to your competitors and your clients doing the same.

In contrast, an organization that has defined its values and integrates them cross-functionally develops a culture that’s built on a unifying foundation. Team members understand why they do what they do and how it matters to the broader mission. The organization has guiding principles that drive strategic decisions and business plans. And, most importantly, there is a culture of value that retains top talent and generates revenue growth by unlocking performance and human potential.