

ALIGNING EMPLOYEES AROUND THE ORGANIZATION'S CORE VALUES

Developing a high-performing organization starts with defining its core values – the actions and behaviors essential to the organization's success. To do this successfully, you must engage your employees in a series of conversations about what it means to be a values-driven organization, what behaviors support the core values, and how important employees are in the daily realization of the core values.

Here are some techniques we use in aligning employees around an organization's core values.

1. First, we use focus groups. Managers, supervisors and employees get a chance to discuss the core values and explore what they mean and what behaviors are most important to supporting them. Customer service, reliability, and financial sustainability are three examples of core values that every company needs to explore. We spend time brainstorming and then narrowing the core values.
2. Second, we work with the senior management team to develop a list of "we statements" that everyone agrees are the behaviors most critical to supporting the core values. This process can take several iterations as the team refines the "we statements."
3. The next step is for the senior management team to measure how well it is upholding the behaviors. The senior management team publicizes the results and makes commitments to improve in areas where its scores are weaker.
4. Next, we assess how well people in the organization exemplify these behaviors. Internally, a survey goes to all employees. Externally, we survey customers and other constituents. We systematically track the results and provide feedback, focusing people on those areas that score low and devising strategies to improve them.
5. To deepen the alignment, we make sure that employee recruitment, orientation, training and promotion are tied to the core values. People get regular orientation and training on the core values. People who demonstrate alignment are promoted over others.
6. Finally, we retool the company's performance appraisal system so that it is aligned with the core values and we statements. That cements the pieces together, creating an integrated system of communication and performance measurement that assures continued attention is placed on the core values.

Those are the ways we align people around an organization's core values. Above all, it means creating a culture in which the core values truly live in the organization – not simply as words on paper, but on a day-to-day basis in people's hearts and minds.