



Live Your Strengths

Welcome to the June edition of *Live Your Strengths*, the monthly e-newsletter from In Search of Excellence.

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***Live Your Strengths* Monthly Challenge**

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Putting Values Into Action (Part 2)

In last month's article, I wrote about the importance of putting organizational values into action. It's not enough for organizations to simply talk about how they want to interact with their key stakeholders (employees, clients, suppliers, volunteers), they need to 'walk the talk'.

The first step in putting values into action is to be very concrete about defining the organization's values. When originally discussing the concept of values with your team, don't just approach the conversation as an exercise in which you generate a list of random words. Open the discussion about what each of these values actually means to your group *in practice* and if any of the values are more important than others.

This clarification and definition process is essential because vagueness in the creation of the values statement can lead to misinterpretation and conflict later. When I work with groups around leadership and strategic planning, I have often found that two people in a given group will define or interpret the same value in very different ways. It is best to decide on a common definition of what the value means to the organization and include these definitions any time the values are being communicated to others.

As a quick example, here are different definitions of the core value of *integrity* from three different organizations:

Gillette: Mutual respect and ethical behaviour are the basis for our relationships with colleagues, customers and the community. Fair practice is the hallmark of the Company.

The Progressive Group of Insurance Companies: We revere honesty. We adhere to the highest ethical standards, provide timely, accurate, and complete financial reporting, encourage disclosing bad news, and welcome disagreement.

RadioShack: Doing the right thing, even when no one is watching. Honesty and openness in relationships with associates, customers, shareholders and vendors. Fair and equal access to opportunity.

Although there are certainly areas of agreement within these three definitions, there is also quite a bit of variation in the way the word 'integrity' is defined. None of these interpretations is any more correct than the others, but they will provide different directions to those who wish to use them as guideposts for organizational decisions.

Once the values are collectively defined, the next step is to discuss what are acceptable and expected behaviours, as they relate to the organization's values.

I would also suggest that an organization have no more than 3-5 values. Any more than that, it is likely that some of the values chosen don't represent the core of what is most important in the organization. Life is about choices and often two seemingly beneficial values will come into conflict with each other – your organization needs to be clear about what it stands for.

Are you ready to start putting your organization's values into action? Join me in this month's *Live*

Your Strengths Challenge.

Live Your Strengths Monthly Challenge: Defining Organizational Values

To put some action into your organization's values, start with these initial steps. They may be done as a team activity within your organization or department, or even as a preliminary exercise on your own.

- 1) Create a definition for each of the values you have chosen as a core value in your organization. What does the word or phrase mean to you? Why is it important to you and to the organization?
- 2) For each value, ask yourself: When the organization is truly embodying this value, what behaviours and attitudes are present? Would someone who was unfamiliar with your organization very quickly understand that this value is important to you and the organization by the actions he/she experienced when visiting the organization for the first time?
- 3) For the organization as a whole, two of the best indicators of what is truly important are how the organization allocates its time and money. Does your organization spend time on the things it claims are its values? If not, how can it visibly and tangibly show that these values are important?
- 4) For you, as an individual within the organization: how do your personal and professional goals relate to the organization's values? Are your goals consistent and complementary? For each of your key goals, can you incorporate actions that better reflect the organization's values in *how* you strive to reach those goals?

Good luck with this challenge and we'll continue the discussion about putting values in action next month!

Cheers,

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