



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

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Putting Organizational Values into Action

Have you noticed that organizations tend to pay a lot of lip service to the concept of *values*, but often these values don't translate well into visible actions? Unfortunately, this seems to be a problem in businesses of all sizes, as well as in non-profit organizations.

During an organization's start-up phase or during later strategic planning sessions, values are often selected that will represent how the organization wants to interact with its stakeholders (whether clients, employees/volunteers, shareholders, suppliers, or the broader community). However, many organizations simply post these values in their offices or print them in annual reports and then forget about them.

This careless treatment of something so important has caused many people to become jaded about the whole notion of organizational values. In fact, many now regard them as little more than a public relations exercise.

I truly believe discussions about organizational values are some of the most important conversations that can happen in an organization. I also believe that when these values conversations do occur, they are generally with the best of intentions. And then... life happens. We get busy; we have competing priorities and multiple demands on our time, leaving us without any time to even reflect on these values, let alone try to *do* anything with them on a daily basis.

However, there are 3 relatively simple steps organizations can take to allow their values to become key tools in their culture, as opposed to a meaningless list of words:

- 1) Decide how to put real action into the values
- 2) Develop a 'moment of truth' action plan
- 3) Make them part of ongoing organizational discussions

In the next few newsletters, I will address each of these ideas and give you some tangible steps to help values become a useful tool in your organization.

But first, I want you to become clear about your own, personal values. Part of the power of organizational values comes from whether they inspire people to want to uphold them. Until you are clear about your own personal values, you cannot make the decision about whether an organization's values are ones that inspire you to want to give of your time, energy, and skills.

If you are ready to explore your own values, join me in this month's *Live Your Strengths* Challenge.

Live Your Strengths Monthly Challenge: Defining Your Personal Values

Several studies have shown that clarity around personal values is quite important to our work. As noted leadership authorities Kouzes and Posner note, *"Clarity of personal values matters greatly to our feeling motivated, creative, and committed to our workplaces. When we're clear about our personal values we feel empowered, ready and prepared to take action."*

Your challenge this month is to develop a list of 5 values that you feel are your *key personal values* - those ideals that are personally important and meaningful for you. Although this may seem like a simple task, what you may find is that you are tempted to list items that are expected or socially desirable, even if they are not personally meaningful to you. Discard from your list any items you are not passionate about. Don't worry about what other people will think of your list – this challenge is all about you.

You may also find it difficult to narrow your list down to only 5 items. This is an important step – you may believe that many values or principles are important, but we are looking for the very short list of things that are *most important* to you. Remember, our goal is to actually create some action around these values; if you have too many values listed, you will not be able to focus on those key principles that will have the most impact on your life.

Once you have created your list, write a definition for each value. Again, the meanings may seem self-explanatory, but you want to be very clear about what each value means in your own context and why it is important to you.

The goal of this exercise is to create a personally meaningful list of values for yourself that will act as a guide for your thoughts and actions over the months and years to come. Over the next few weeks, challenge yourself to reflect on how well you are living your values in your personal and work life. It's not always easy to live by your values, but you will find that your life will become more fulfilling when you find ways to be true to what's most important to you.

Good luck with this challenge and we'll talk more about values-in-action at work next month!

Cheers,
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