



Values-Based Leadership

Are Your Core Values A Lie?



Within the American workforce, and certainly on these pages, organizational core values are often touted as guiding principles, the moral compass steering organizations and ideally their employees towards success and purpose. But what happens when these values, prominently displayed on websites and office walls, turn out to be simply a looks-good square filler? Yet in the C-Suite senior leaders are out of touch at best or concealing a darker reality of hypocrisy and deception. While in the halls, on the floor, and in the field an employee cuts corners, projects are late, supervisors and managers micro-manage, and employees are not engaged and lack motivation.

Organizations have been adopting core values to express the desired behaviors customers and employees can expect. Unfortunately for many, they are simply nice to have square fillers. Oh sure they are well-meaning, however throughout time, major corporations, government agencies, and small businesses research have unearthed unsettling truths, revealing how proclaimed core values stand in stark contrast to actual practices. They proclaim collaboration as a core value, yet they still work in silos and reward individual behavior over teamwork. Service is a value, yet employees are unwilling to take initiative. Respect is a value, but unresolved conflict and toxic employees persist.

A Hollow Promise

Recently Boeing and its supplier, Spirit AeroSystems, are facing scrutiny due to a recent incident involving the loss of a door plug mid-flight, highlighting broader safety concerns.



Boeing's stated core values are:

- Engineering excellence.
- Be accountable
- Crush bureaucracy.
- Predictability and stability
- Safety, quality, integrity, and sustainability.

However, multiple sources indicate a longstanding issue in which management and engineering teams prioritized meeting deadlines over maintaining quality, production quotas over quality, and practices such as "inspector shopping" (inspectors known to take shortcuts). Boeing also tolerated flaws in parts supplied by Spirit AeroSystems again suggesting a culture prioritizing speed over quality.

Former quality auditor and whistleblower Joshua Dean (now deceased) raised concerns about the company's emphasis on reducing reported defects rather than addressing underlying issues. "We're having pizza parties because we're lowering defects. But we're not lowering defects. We just ain't reporting them, you know what I mean?" Instead, Dean got frustrated with what he describes as a "culture" that pressured employees not to report defects to get planes out of the factory faster.

Apparently, their organizational core values - the values which are supposed to be in place to drive behavior and facilitate the desired culture . . . are a LIE! Despite Boeing's assertions of improvement, an FAA audit uncovered quality lapses and deficiencies in Boeing's safety culture.

But all is not lost. In response to these allegations, Boeing has vowed to address the underlying issues and restore confidence in its manufacturing processes with a Boeing rep stating, "We have a clear picture of what needs to be done. Transparency prevailed in all of these discussions." Oh, NOW we believe in transparency. Maybe they would do well to have conversations about their core values from the CEO down to the newest intern on a consistent and regular basis so they are at the forefront of everyone's mind.

The issue extends beyond Boeing and Spirit AeroSystems. The state of Georgia's Environmental Protection Division was on its way to giving final approval so Georgia Power could leave 48 million tons of coal ash buried in unlined ponds — despite evidence that contaminants were leaking out. Apparently Georgia Power's core values - Safety First, Intentional Inclusion, Act with Integrity, and Superior Performance - you know the values designed to drive their behavior and decisions - are LIES!

These examples - and the many more that can be found easily on the internet, or perhaps in your organization — it doesn't mean everyone lacks values, not at all. What it does mean the collective leadership, whether it be from the C-suite, middle managers, or frontline supervisors a culture of behaviors and decisions contrary to the core values are being perpetuated.

I often get pushback from organizational leaders that, "We don't need to talk about core values. Everyone knows what they are" . . . until they don't. Instead, the values everyone is operating by are counter to what is identified and is right and good for the organization, the employees, and the customer.

Conclusion: Rethinking Organizational Values

In an era marked by scandals and ethical lapses, it is imperative to question the sincerity of organizational core values. Mere rhetoric devoid of genuine commitment serves only to perpetuate a culture of hypocrisy and cynicism. Companies must prioritize authenticity and accountability, aligning their actions with their stated values to build trust and credibility. As employees, we hold the power to not only demand accountability from our leadership and coworkers but of ourselves as well. By scrutinizing corporate practices and holding companies accountable for their actions, we can strive towards a future where organizational core values are not just empty slogans, but meaningful commitments upheld with integrity and purpose.

Be Extraordinary!

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