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The Value of Values

By Eric Garner

One of the toughest jobs a leader has to perform is to act as guardian of an organisation's values.

An organisation's values are the things that are really important to it.

In the early days of an enterprise, the values are sometimes the only thing that keeps the business going. When other factors make the chances of survival doubtful, such as funds, markets, and technology, it is the set of beliefs held by the original founders which pull the business through. The beliefs of the organization are almost always the beliefs of the original leaders.

These beliefs are intangible. Think of Unilever's belief in co-operation, or Mars's belief in efficiency, or IBM's belief in innovation, or Hewlett-Packard's belief in "plain hard work", or Levi-Strauss's belief in empathy with its customers. It is the high value placed on these beliefs that ensure these organizations survive in the first place and continue to survive.

As the years go by, and the organization changes its technology, its products and its leaders, there is a danger that it may abandon its original set of beliefs or relegate them in importance or forget them. To do so is to risk corporate suicide. If original values have to change - often a difficult step - then new values must replace them and be as meaningful, relevant and important as the original ones.

As custodians of the organisation's values, leaders have to know the values, live the values, and preserve the values. John Maxwell tells the story of how John Wooden, head basketball coach at the University of California, put values before expediency. Wooden had spotted an outstanding young basketball player whose skills would be an asset to his line-up. Everyone urged him to sign the youth. But Wooden was unsure. Something in the young man's demeanour bothered him. So he arranged a home visit, with the contract all prepared in his inside pocket. When he took tea with the family, he couldn't help noticing a disrespectfulness in the youth's attitude towards his mother. One of the key values in Wooden's team was respect. And it was a value he intended to maintain. As a result, the contract stayed in his pocket.

Values are not just important for the organization. They are the touchstone that determines whether people succeed in the organization. When the chips are down, it's not what you do that counts, but

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whether you stay true to the values. As Christel Brown says, "People do things because of their values. People rob banks because their values include greed, more money and maybe recognition. People die on the battlefield because their values include love of their country and patriotism." Values are the ultimate people motivators. In organizations where values matter, people may be dismissed for violating the rules; they should always be dismissed for violating the values.

John Maxwell says that values are at the heart of everything an organization does, hence the use of the phrase "core values". "Values are like glue. They hold an organization together. Values are like a ruler. They set the standard for a team's performance. Values are like a compass. They give direction and guidance. Values are like a magnet. They attract like-minded people. Values provide identity. They define and identify the team."

One last example. Few people today have heard of Phil Knight, Bill Bowerman and Steve Prefontaine.

But these three were the driving force and inspiration that created Nike, the footwear and clothing colossus. And what drove them? A passionate belief that things could be done. The stories of Bowerman's endless experiments with the family waffle iron into which he poured rubber to create the best running shoe sole are legendary. So are Prefontaine's battles to make running a professional sport. Today, Nike actually employs executives as "corporate storytellers" to remind their staff of the values of the original founders and that their business is about getting things done.

In business, as in life, beliefs can move mountains. Without belief, without a positive set of beliefs, and without action to act on these beliefs, we achieve nothing. Our beliefs and values drive us and our businesses. As Alvin Toffler says, "Every business has a belief system and it is at least as important as its accounting system or its authority system."

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Leverage Avoidance Values for Irresistible Selling

By Peter Murphy

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The most gifted influencers know that to be highly persuasive they must appeal to the values of the person they are speaking

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to.

What are values? Values are filters that everyone uses to help make sense of all the information we must process before we make a decision. When you appeal to a person's values you speak directly to their decision-making criteria.

Values:

In simple terms, values are what is most important to us. If you ask yourself: what is most important to me about having a new car? You will discover the key issues that you consider when buying a car. Your prospects will also pay attention to their values when you present your offering.

Ask your prospects what is most important to them and they will tell you their values, it is then up to you to structure your conversation around what matters to them.

So if they value ease of use and simplicity – don't waste their time talking about advanced functions. Instead spend extra time and go into great detail explaining all there is to know about how easy it is to use the product.

By talking about what your prospect considers most important you will grab their attention and quickly find out if your offering is for them. And this is as far as most people get with their persuasion skills. There is a further step however.

Avoidance Values:

When you also discover and appeal to what your client wants to avoid, you become an especially valuable advisor. Everyone has avoidance values i.e. what is important to avoid. In the example of buying a car, it could be wanting to avoid costly maintenance, high insurance premiums and the disapproval of the neighbors.

Your only challenge is that people often won't tell you what their avoidance values are because they don't always know

themselves. Only when you ask the right questions will you be able to help them discover what these values are. Give them an example of what you mean by avoidance values and then ask them:

What must you absolutely not have when driving a car?

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What do you not want in a car?

What do you want to avoid at all costs by using this product?

Which factors are the most important to avoid?

Typical answers might include – poor visibility, limited leg room, a noisy engine. Let's say you were selling software, the answers might be data loss, system crashes, limited upgrades.

Show your prospect how your product satisfies her values and protects her from her avoidance values and your powers of persuasion will be irresistible.

Give yourself time to get used to asking probing questions that elicit avoidance values. Although it seems unusual at first it does get easier with practice.

Peter Murphy is a freelance business writer. He publishes a free weekly ezine full of practical tips for communicating at your best under pressure. All new subscribers receive a free e-book with powerful strategies for being at your best. To subscribe send a blank email to:



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