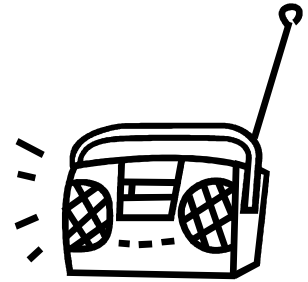


Work and Values

Is “Wake up to Wogan” standard breakfast fare in your house?

It is mine. This Radio 2 programme has a slot at 09.15 or so each day in which leaders from different faiths “Pause for Thought”.

In early December 2005 the Reverend Ruth Scott said this:



“I stand in a very different place today than I did 30 years ago precisely because I have lived with and listened to people whose stories are very different from my own, when these stories have been shared in a context of mutual respect and humility I have felt free to reflect upon them in the light of what I already know and value and to embrace new ways of seeing and being that make sense to me.”.

Here we have someone taking in new perspectives, anchoring those insights on existing values and knowledge to inform how they will then be as a person.

Leaders in many arenas talk about values.



In his Brighton conference speech in September 2005 the Right Honourable Tony Blair MP declared

“The challenge we face is not in our values. It is how we put them into practice in a world fast-forwarding to the future at unprecedented speed” so values are acting as a central focus for wider activity and in the next example we find values used as a basis for decision making.

Talking at the Institute of Directors in October 2005 Jack Welch described changing the culture at GE “When I did fire people, I did it in front of 500 people. I explained why five senior vice presidents, who were good people with good results, had to leave because of values violations. That changed the game. All my talk about it didn’t count until that happened. You will change your company forever if you fire a high-performing, high-level person, who is doing it unfairly, and you explain why.”



In the early 1990’s Nationwide had problems.

Alongside external factors like a depressed housing market and a carpet bagging climate that prompted some members of the public to join mutual building societies with the intention of driving for demutualization for a quick profit, inside Nationwide communication was poor, results were poor and strategic direction was lacking. By the mid 1990’s work was underway on a culture change programme which included an aggressive pursuit of the mutual agenda and fresh focus on staff.

By 2002 this had evolved into PRIDE – five clearly articulated organisational values that were espoused and promoted by the CEO and executive team:

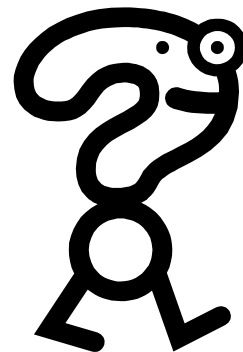
- Putting members first
- Rising to the challenge
- Inspiring confidence
- Delivering best value
- Exceeding expectations

PRIDE values have remained constant since then and been placed at the heart of everything the organisation undertakes from recognition and reward to performance agreements, marketing and business planning.

Speaking at the Entrepreneurship and Leadership Summit at the Institute of Directors in November 2005, Nationwide Commercial and Communications Director Stuart Bernau said that employee satisfaction has gone from 55 percent in 1996 to 77 per cent in 2005, and that those teams turning in the highest scores on PRIDE values were also turning in the highest sales scores – in fact there was almost a point for point relationship. So values make good business sense.

Why Work With Values ?

Being voluntary and community sector born and bred in terms of my own management and leadership life I hold a firm belief about values and about the power of working with them.



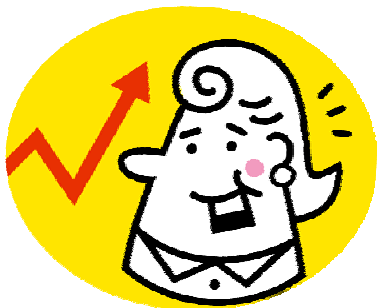
I believe that when leadership is visibly and consciously informed by values that this creates an opportunity for followers to align their personal values with those of the leadership and therefore with the organisation for maximum mutual benefit.

Alignment, in my view, benefits everyone.

For us as individuals values are the things that give us meaning and motivation thus creating a sense of purpose. When we work on and with things that we regard as purposeful we feel at ease with ourselves and are less susceptible to stress. In an interview with People Management magazine Charles Handy says that he regards being totally at ease with oneself as the meaning of success “Aristotle calls it ‘eudaimonia’: flourishing by doing your best at what you are best at”.

Increasingly people are seeking meaning in their work. In terms of why people work, as Professor Neal Chalofsky puts it “in survey after survey and study after study when the questions push beneath the surface, people list money behind values such as satisfaction, close working relationships, autonomy, work-life balance and learning”.

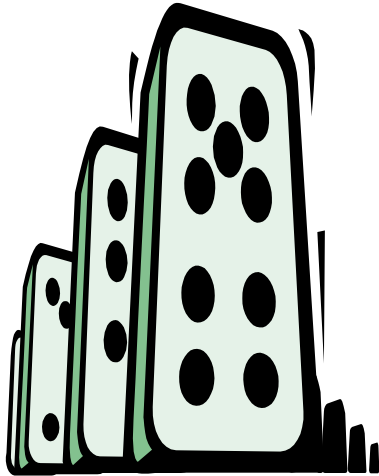
When at least some of the things that matter to us can be fulfilled at work we are happier and more productive but when they are not we suffer. Dr Brian Baxter of the Association on Business Psychologists says “suffering will manifest itself as stress, dysfunctional behaviour or sickness, all symptoms of a deeper psychological lack and cultural malaise in the organisation”. Clearly this is a situation we would all like to avoid and working with values is one way to address these issues.



When alignment creates happier motivated people who experience purpose in their work then the conditions are right for their organisations to experience significant benefits such as:

- reduced staff turnover - Nationwide reports increasing the average stay of its staff over the last five years to currently 9½ years
- improved morale – Burger King New Zealand went through a values programme some time after which Alan Watts, Operations Manager, said “Our management turnover has declined. There’s definitely more of a “can do” attitude in the business. People are coping more enthusiastically and responding to challenges in a positive way. It’s a ‘bring it on’ attitude” (Henderson and Thompson 2003)

It is not my belief that followers should be expected to adopt the same values as the leadership (although this may happen naturally through socialisation): this could be regarded as viewing the values of the individual as somehow less worthy than those of the leadership which I do not agree with - what matters is alignment.



For example: if I personally value *human dignity* then leadership that embraces *respect* would “chime” with my personal view as would leadership that had a goal of *social justice* – this would be alignment not adoption – all the values continue to exist in their original form but instead of being pursued along different paths can be pursued along the same path. Imagine a set of dominos, they have different numbers of dots in different patterns but when they are all lined up everything falls into place.

Our company, Magma Effect Limited, works with values to create insight for meaning and motivation. We work with individuals, teams and whole organisations to create ways of working that harness the power of values in order to promote a sense of wellbeing and enhance the capability of people to deliver peak performance.

Jackie Le Fèvre BSc Hons, Cert Ed, MIPR, MCMI
Director

Copyright © Magma Effect Ltd