



Keep Values Simple

by Robert Whipple: MBA, CPLP

Few people would doubt the impact of a good set of values for any organization. Values provide a bedrock of beliefs on which leaders build the culture for their group. The true power of values lies in having everyone in the organization not only understand them but live them every day. That is why I believe it is a mistake to make the values too complex.

Some leaders get enamored by the idea of values and create a set of complex rules that would take a rocket scientist to remember. It is not uncommon to have a list of 20-30 values published by a leader. This sounds like a good idea on the surface; after all, the more values we have the better, right? Not so fast! If the list is cumbersome and hard to remember, then people will have a difficult time remembering them, much less following them every day.

Coach Krzyzewski of the Duke Basketball Program modeled a kind of philosophy with values that helps illustrate the power of a short memorable list. He has used the analogy of the "fist" with each finger being one powerful value that is used to create passion and unity among his teams. The fingers represent 1) Communication, 2) Trust, 3) Collective Responsibility, 4) Care, and 5) Pride. By centering all activities in relation to a powerful fist, Coach K has nurtured a consistent champion level team that has won two National Championships.

Another coach who understood the benefits of a simple philosophy of values was Lou Holtz. He took over 6 collegiate football programs in his career. He never inherited a winning team, but never failed to take that team to a Bowl Game by his second season at the latest. His values were boiled down to only three concepts: 1) Do what's right, 2) Do the best you can, and 3) Treat others like you would like to be treated. The incredible simplicity of this philosophy made it easy to translate the passion embodied in these values into the hearts of all players. The results speak for themselves.

Simple but great values are not just for sports teams. Any organization will benefit from a memorable set of foundational concepts. My home town of Rochester, NY is blessed to be the home of Wegmans, one of the most successful chains of grocery stores in the world and a frequent top placement in the 100 best places to work in America. The current CEO, Colleen Wegman, said of their values, "We're committed to our *Who We Are Values* because they set a strong foundation for us as a company - a

foundation of caring about people and each other." The Wegmans values are very simple: 1) Caring, 2) Respect, 3) High Standards, 4) Making a Difference, and 5) Empowerment.

If you are a leader in an organization, challenge your senior team to come up with a handful of powerful words that describe the essence of your core values. Keep the list of values short so everyone will remember and live them daily.

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