

How to Create a Business
that Reflects Your Values

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The Accelerating Pace

By BARB McEWEN

We are living in dynamic times and in a horrendously fast-paced environment. From boom to bust and back again. Today's fast-paced economy demands that businesses change or die. There appears to be almost continuous reorganizing, then there is the need to be more innovative in order to compete, and somewhere in between we are trying to relate to people and establish relationships.

Few companies are managing these changes as well as they would like and managers are experiencing a whole new type of exhaustion. They have ever-widening spans of control, reorganization threatens positions, performance targets have become even tougher and

production goes on around the globe and around the clock.

The times that were once reserved for family have now been squeezed by the duty to answer e-mails, voice mails and faxes. What didn't get done at the office, thanks to technology, is now being done at home. The more you do, the more that is expected of you. If you do special projects well, guess what, you are relied upon for more special projects.

SO WHAT CAN WE DO TO PREVENT BURNOUT?

From the organizational side of things, managers need to recognize that burnout can and does happen and it is not a

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editor's note



Most accountants I know are smart people when it comes to accounting principles and the tax code. But, we all know a lot of smart people who aren't successful or rich.

Becoming successful requires moving beyond the technical boundary of their profession. First, successful individuals know how to manage cash flow. If you are involved in managing the firm, you

Technical Expertise Does Not Guarantee Success

quickly become pretty good at the management of cash flow or you are always borrowing from the bank.

Second, you realize that systems (tax processing, billing and collection procedures, etc.) are critical for the overall success of the practice. Every time you re-invent the wheel, it costs you money.

Third, you have to learn to how to manage people – yourself, your staff and your fellow owners.

These are the big three when it comes to basic success – managing people, systems and cash flow.

But real success requires two more ingredients – communication and sales. Those who can communicate effectively with staff, other owners, clients and referral sources will always be more successful. If you feel your communication skills can be improved, start today. Don't say you don't have time to learn or improve upon this important skill.

It does no good to know every aspect of the IRS Code if you can't explain it to your clients. Learn to communicate effectively and you will see profits rise.

August J. Aguilar

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How to Create a Business that Reflects Your Values

BY MARSHA LINDQUIST

Every business leader has a different leadership style. Some prefer a flexible work environment, where their employees are trusted to come and go as they please, dress the way they want, and focus their initiative on the projects they feel are most important. Other business leaders prefer a more rigid work environment, where employees have predetermined work schedules, a common objective, and assigned tasks. Each approach has its pros and cons, but neither style is superior unless it reflects your values and it works in your organization.

Just like every leader is unique, every business is unique as well. What's most important about the work environment in an organization is that the leadership establishes the culture, focus and behaviors. To accomplish this, the leader must consider his or her own values, and then communicate and model these ideals for everyone else in the company.

Every business owner or executive team has to make these three decisions:

1. What will your corporate culture look like?
2. What will you focus on?
3. How will you behave?

If you, as a business owner, general manager or division manager don't make decisions in these three realms, then someone in your organization will take the initiative and make them for you. And when someone else establishes the culture, focus and behavior for your employees, they may not reflect your values and you probably won't like it.

So how can you strengthen your leadership and ensure that your

organization's focus, corporate culture and employee behaviors reflect your values? Use the following four strategies.

1. Create a corporate culture that reflects your vision of the way you want your organization to be. Your vision – or your lack of it – will reflect in your organization's business. Where you don't make decisions, employees will fill in the blanks because they need leadership. Part of that leadership is to create a corporate culture – a vision and general belief system for your organization. Then you'll see natural leaders emerging from your employee ranks. Realize that a leader will emerge in the absence of the leader. The people who are strong and extroverted will set the stage for you, whether you like it or not.

Your corporate culture reflects in everything your business does, from the way people dress and what time they come to work, to when they leave, how long they take for lunch and how they talk to one another. If you don't like that your people are wearing jeans on Friday, or their lackadaisical attitude, then consider how this happened. You failed to set an example of what you want your corporate culture to be, so you practically invited your employees, intentionally or not, to set the stage for you.

Ensuring that your corporate culture is a product of your own vision is absolutely critical in order to control the company's success and your expectations for the way your employees behave and what they focus on.

2. Determine your company's focus by setting the rules. Set the rules about your vision and the expectations you want everyone to focus on. Do you want your team to focus on customer service? Seeking op-

portunities for growth? Eliminating overhead? Or expanding the client base? If you don't determine the top two or three goals for your organization, then the people who are working for you will make up their own. And their goals may not be the goals you want. Or, perhaps even worse, each person will focus on something completely different.

What's most *important* about the work environment in an organization is that the leadership establishes the culture, focus and behaviors.

For example, your employees may focus their energy on projects that do not serve your target customer base, which can spread your entire organization too thin. Or your employees may not be oriented to profit, which can slow growth and limit your bottom line. Wherever you choose to focus your energy, make sure your decision is clear to everyone. Then establish rules for how each team member spends their time, otherwise your employees will do their own thing.

3. Model the behavior you want to see in the group by what you do and how you do it. Leaders set the example for their team members. So if a CEO is just crazy about e-mail, and he pops off e-mails all day long, then everyone else in the company will do the same thing. As a result, the organization will suffer from a lack of quality, face-to-face meetings. Following the behavior of the CEO, no one in the group has productive, meaningful interactions anymore. The CEO sets a bad example, and gets bad results.

If you see behavior you don't like in your organization – if people are doing things you don't approve of – you have

to first take a look at yourself and what you're doing, because you may be setting the example. You may be unaware that you are exhibiting an undesirable behavior, doing something you didn't even know you were doing. For instance, if you observe and don't like that your people speak abruptly with one another, you must ask yourself if you are abrupt in your own interactions. Do you set an example of flexible, amenable and considerate customer interaction? Do your employees? They're not likely to if you don't.

Make clear decisions about the behavior you want to see in your organization. Then, it is important to model that behavior and communicate your wishes in such a way that your people can follow your lead.

4. Communicate your values every day. If you don't communicate what you expect up front and then again on a regular basis, you're missing the mark. In order for your desired culture to take hold into every employee and facet of the company, you must reinforce what you want verbally, physically and visually.

In addition to modeling the behavior you want, reinforce the company's culture in your newsletter, on your intranet, in your orientation manual, on your web site and in all your verbal and written communication. Use contrasting examples during meetings to illustrate what you don't want. For example, if a company is in the news for some unethical behavior or one that goes against your desired culture, highlight it during a meeting by stating, "This is not how we do business." Remember that everyone learns and retains information differently, so use a combination of reinforcement tools to ensure your message gets heard.

THE VALUE ADVANTAGE FOR YOUR FUTURE

Every team environment needs a leader who is responsible for establishing the culture, focus and behavior for

the company. When a leader is not strong in all three of these aspects, another leader will emerge from within the ranks and put his or her own fingerprint on the company. This leader will turn your organization into what he or she wants it to be, and it may not be what you, the owner or CEO, want.

In addition to modeling the behavior you want, reinforce the company's *culture* in your newsletter, on your intranet, in your orientation manual, on your web site and in all your verbal and written communication.

When you use these strategies for determining your corporate culture, focusing the organization, and establishing acceptable behavior, you and your company win in more ways than one. You assert your leadership, strengthen your organization and create a company that is based on the values that are most important to you.

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