Success For A Buck!

The Invisible Architecture of your Organization

This 32-page report summarizes the rationale for conducting formal training on values-based life and leadership in the organizational setting, and shares some of the most important success strategies Values Coach has learned in fifteen years of conducting such training.

SPECIAL REPORT

A Service of **Values Coach Inc.**
Transforming People through the Power of Values
Transforming Organizations through the Power of People

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A VALUES COACH SPECIAL REPORT

The Invisible Architecture of Your Organization

Why Core Values, Corporate Culture, Workplace Environment, and Projected Identity are More Important to Your Organization's Future than are the Buildings in which You Work

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Values Coach America™

Transforming People through the Power of Values

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Executive Summary: Designing the Invisible Architecture

When someone (customer, patient, visitor, prospective employee) first walks into your organization, their initial impression will be created by the physical surroundings. They will have a very different impression if you're located in a fancy new office building with a fountain in the lobby than if you're located in a rehabilitated warehouse down at dockside. Knowing this, you've doubtless put a lot of thought into the design and furnishing of your space, probably with professional help to make sure you get the details just right.

But lasting impressions aren't created by things that can be seen by the eye, are they? Rather, they're created by the unseen qualities that spark emotional reactions. This emotionality is vital to the future of every business, including that of your organization. Most business leaders don't put the same detailed thought into the design of this Invisible Architecture that they invest in physical design. If you take the time, though, it can be one of the best investments you'll ever make.

This special report considers four interrelated dimensions of the architecture which can be seen only with the heart and not with the eyes: Core Values, Corporate Culture, Workplace Environment, and Projected Identity. Here's a quick summary:

Core Values: Most organizations have (or should have) a statement of values, but very few have effectively utilized their commitment to these values as a resource for recruiting and retaining great people and competing for loyal customers.

Corporate Culture: Culture is to the organization what character and personality are to the individual. Culture is the only sustainable source of competitive advantage, because it is the one thing that no competitor can copy or steal. Culture is defined by a very small number of overarching themes, which are then woven into all of the different subcultures throughout the organization.

Workplace Environment: This is the emotional climate of the work unit: what it feels like to work in each part of the organization. Workplace environment is the most important determinant of whether people feel engaged in the work itself, or are simply going through the motions for a paycheck. Unfortunately, a small number of negative people can poison a workplace the way one or two smokers quickly fill a room with toxic cigarette smoke.

Projected Identity: This is the external identity of the organization as perceived by people on the inside. It is how people answer the universal icebreaker question, "What do you do?" This identity substantially determines the degree to which people take pride in their organization and in their jobs. It's the difference between answering that icebreaker question with "I'm just a housekeeper," or "I'm a nurse in the Peace Corps," or "I'm an account executive at Enron."

Each of these elements of the invisible architecture of your organization (or your part of the organization) is amenable to your influence. In fact, influencing these four dimensions of the Invisible Architecture is perhaps the most important of all leadership responsibilities. If you are a parent, with a bit of thought you can apply many of the concepts and principles outlined in this report at home. *Important Point:* You do not have to be the CEO in order to influence the Invisible Architecture of your organization. Quite to the contrary, unlike the physical facility, in which design and construction is delegated to a small and specialized crew, the Invisible Architecture is influenced by each of us as we go about our daily business.

The Left Brain Counts but the Right Brain Matters

You probably know about the distinction between left brain and right brain. The left brain is the logical and linear bean-counter; the right brain is the creative and emotional poet, to put it metaphorically. Left brain (logical, linear, problem-solving) and right brain (emotional, nonlinear, and creative) each have a place in building a stronger organization, but crafting the Invisible Architecture is largely a right brain exercise. Left brain attributes such as accounting, marketing, and strategic planning are necessary to create a *good* company – in fact, can help you develop a very good

company – but right brain attributes such as courage, passion, enthusiasm, loyalty, and creativity are essential if you wish to build a *great* company. Most organizations have a strong focus on left brain; the best create a balance between the two. Here are some of the ways that the two thinking hemispheres of the human brain interact:

- Left brain is what you do; right brain is who you are.
- Left brain is management; right brain is leadership. Left brain can define a vision and create the plan for fulfilling that vision, but it takes right brain to inspire people to follow you toward the dream.
- Right brain innovates, left brain optimizes.
- You can measure left brain attributes like quarterly revenues and expenses, but you cannot see them except as abstractions on paper; you cannot measure right brain attributes like enthusiasm, but you can see them in the smile of a customer service representative.
- Left brain qualities are not contagious; right brain qualities are. You cannot "catch" accounting skills, but toxic emotional negativity will infect an organization faster than the flu bug spreads through a kindergarten class.
- Especially in the short run, left brain attributes are a given; you cannot "decide" to be a math whiz. But right brain qualities are more often a choice – you *choose* whether to be positive or negative at any given time.
- Left brain problems can be left behind at work, but you bring right brain emotions home with you, for better or worse.
- You learn right brain skills in kindergarten; after that school is all left brain. If you want advanced courses in emotional intelligence or mental toughness, you're on your own.
- All left brain is boring; all right brain is chaos!

This Values Coach special report will share practical strategies – some that are relatively conventional and others that are distinctly unconventional – that can help

you craft the Invisible Architecture that will best complement your beautiful buildings.

I. Core Values: Laying a Solid Foundation

"Identifying the core values that define your organization is one of the most important functions of leadership. The success or failure of this process can literally make or break an organization."

Ken Blanchard: *The Heart of a Leader*

Personal values provide a deeply-internalized philosophical guide that influence goal-setting, decision-making, conflict resolution, and how one lives one's life. That's what the Values Coach course on *The Twelve Core Action Values* is all about – personal values for a fulfilling life (we often hear course participants call this curriculum "graduate school for life"). Organizational values are different. They focus more on behavioral expectations (e.g. professionalism) and desired outcomes (e.g. customer service or quality care). The most effective values statements clearly define what the organization stands for – and what it won't stand for.

There is a chart in the book *Impending Crisis: Too Many Jobs, Too Few People* by Roger Herman and colleagues that shows a virtual straight-line relationship between how effectively an organization has framed and communicated its values on the one hand and employee loyalty on the other. Given that recruiting and retaining good people will be the biggest challenge facing most organizations in the years to come, laying that solid foundation of values will be Leadership Job #1.

Auto-Owners Insurance is a Fortune 500 company that takes values very seriously. Over the past seven years, Values Coach has worked with the A-O leadership team to create and conduct a variety of courses for associates based on the company's ten core values. Over the past several years, as I have travelled the country with the company, I've been randomly selecting associates and asking them to tell me the company's ten core values – from memory. The *modal* response is ten out of ten, and the lowest response I've ever gotten is five – and that from a student intern who'd only been with the company for about a month!

For Auto-Owners, attention to values pays off in a big way. Through hard markets and soft, Auto-Owners has been growing and profitable, and has been highly successful in recruiting and retaining great people. The last two years have been the most profitable in the company's history; CEO Roger Looyenga attributes much of this success to Auto-Owners' commitment to values training.

As one example, Emily Huling (President of Selling Strategies Inc.) tells the story of how an Auto-Owners manager who'd tried everything with an associate who had both attitude and performance problems finally called him into the office and laid the company's ten core values in front of him. He told the associate that the company takes those values very seriously, and expects every associate to do the same. He gave the associate one day to prepare a written plan for how he would make sure that those values would be reflected in his work. That is bringing performance appraisal to the level of a high art.

How-To Strategies for Core Values

Distinguish between values, behaviors, and outcomes and make the WIIFM connection
Many values statements include a blend of values, behaviors, and outcomes. For example, "enthusiasm" is a core value; "professionalism" is a behavior; and "service excellence" is an outcome. If you desire to achieve service excellence, start by convincing people that being more enthusiastic will help them be happier in their personal lives, and being more professional will help them be more successful in their professional lives. Motivational speaker Zig Ziglar says we all listen to the same radio station – WIIFM, or What's In It For Me? Your organization no doubt values excellent customer service, but it's unlikely your people go home and talk about customer service over the dinner table. Helping people connect their personal values with the organization's goals is one of the most effective means of achieving genuine buy-in to those goals.

Put it in writing and learn it by heart
Every organization should have a written values statement. This forces you to ask yourself, from among the almost limitless possibilities, which values truly define what

you stand for (and what you won't stand for). But don't limit yourself to a statement of values hanging on the wall. Be creative. Think of other approaches to keep your values front-and-center. Review them prior to every management meeting. One Values Coach client incorporated *The Twelve Core Action Values* into every job description, and hence in every performance appraisal. Another commissioned us to write a book that included a fictionalized history of the company and its commitment to values. Once the values have been written down, everyone (or at least every manager) should be expected to know those values by heart ("by heart" – implying at a deeper level than just cognitive knowledge of the words).

Claim a value that gives you unique positioning

It's unusual for a small community hospital or a farmer-owned cooperative to claim "innovation" as a core value, yet both Griffin Hospital and West Central Coop have done just this. Through its ownership of The Planetree Alliance, tiny Griffin is having a nationwide impact far out of proportion to its size. West Central has become one of the world's largest producers of biodiesel fuel. For each, claiming innovation as a core value has encouraged out-of-the-box thinking and willingness to take risks considered too radical by their peers. Please note use of the word "claim." Griffin and West Central don't merely *proclaim* innovation as a value, they *claim* innovation as a source of competitive superiority.

Specify behavioral expectations

This is where the rubber hits the road. It's the difference between values that are commitments and values that are merely good intentions. For example, if "honesty" is included in a values statement, people should know specifically what that means in their jobs. What does it mean to be honest in giving a performance appraisal? What would honesty dictate if one were involved in a conversation involving gossip?

Prepare in advance for inevitable values conflicts

One of the reasons Enron crashed was that many of its people got stuck in a double bind where they could honor one value – loyalty – but only at the expense of dishonoring another value – honesty. Every parent who has been told his or her

child needs "tough love" is placed in an analogous position. These tough choices are inevitable; thinking about how to make them in the context of core values can assure that the best decision is made when there is no "right" decision.

Make values integral to your training process

Values should be an integral component of your recruiting and retention. Some organizations have people sign a statement agreeing to honor those values as a condition of even being interviewed. Your values should be included in orientation, and should be the subject of ongoing training. At Auto-Owners, each of the company's ten core values are presented by a senior officer to convey the importance they ascribe to those values.

Values should not be optional

The reason most Auto-Owners associates can repeat all ten of the company's values from memory is that it's *expected* of them. By creating the expectation that people will know and live those values, by including values in its training programs, and by making them ubiquitous (it's not unusual to see the ten core values posted in an associate's cubicle, even though each associate has discretion regarding what is posted on their walls), Auto-Owners has created a solid link between values and behaviors. Not only can most associates recite all ten core values from memory, they can also express some of the ways those values are acted upon by the company (for example, "loyalty" is reflected in the fact that in 90 years Auto-Owners has never had a layoff, and that it promotes only from within) and in their personal behaviors (for example, "opportunities for associates" means that people must be willing to learn and to grow, and in some cases to relocate geographically in order to pursue those opportunities).

Focus values on key operating challenges

Since values are a prime human motivator, bringing them to bear on the organization's biggest challenges can bear substantial fruit. Values Coach was working with a large urban hospital that had serious staffing shortages and a high attrition rate. One of the things we did was create a custom audio CD entitled *B4U*

Leave, which the human resources department could give to any employee who submitted, or threatened to submit, a resignation. The CD asked people to think about their decision not in the context of money or other job-related issues, but rather in the context of their own core values.

Champion your champions

Building a critical mass of "values champions," and supporting them with time and resources to promote the organization's values, is an effective way of permeating the organization with values-based thinking, decision-making, and conflict resolution. When we conduct "Spark Plug" training on *The Twelve Core Action Values*, we typically strive to include 5-10% of the total workforce so there is mutual support within the group.

Don't believe your own press clippings

Have you ever walked into a business establishment and read a statement to the effect that "we value our customers," only to be greeted by a surly and preoccupied employee? It happens all the time, even in organizations that take values seriously. Every now and then, it's helpful to have an objective outside observer identify the gap between stated values and observed behaviors.

Stick with it

Values training is not a quick fix for your organization's problems or challenges; it's a long-term investment in the character strength and personal abilities of your people. Promoting values as the "program of the month" is a waste of time and energy.

Important: Don't go through the charade of parading out a values initiative if you don't intend to scrupulously adhere to those values, and to hold people accountable for performing in accordance with them. Telling the world that you honor your values and then not doing it is worse than not talking about values at all. Remember, Enron had the words "integrity," "respect," and "dignity" in its written values statement, and today is most remembered for the vast gulf between what its leaders said and what they actually did.

II. Corporate Culture – the character and personality of your organization

"The visionary companies translate their ideologies into *tangible* mechanisms aligned to send a consistent set of reinforcing signals… This finding has massive practical implications. It means that companies seeking an 'empowered' or decentralized work environment should first and foremost impose a tight ideology, screen and indoctrinate people into that ideology, eject the viruses, and give those who remain the tremendous sense of responsibility that comes with membership in an elite organization." (emphasis in original)

Jim Collins and Jerry Porras: *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*

At a recent conference of VA Health Service directors, one of the speakers said that "culture will eat strategy for lunch." He's right. Culture is to an organization what character and personality are to the individual. Culture is also the only *sustainable* source of competitive advantage when it comes to competing for both talent and for customers. Everything else can either be copied (e.g. technology and business models) or stolen (e.g. your best people).

More than anything else, culture helps to define an organization. IBM and Apple are both computer companies, and they hire people with similar educational and experiential backgrounds, but the workplace experience could not be more different. Someone who is happy and successful working in the Apple culture might end up a failure at IBM, and vice versa, because of the conflict between individual personality and corporate culture.

How-To Strategies for Corporate Culture

Recognize that culture is like a patchwork quilt

Any organization of more than two people does not have a single culture; rather, it is a patchwork of cultures. Let's take a typical hospital, for example. There is a nursing culture and a food service culture and a pharmacy culture and a housekeeping culture (and so forth). And within each culture, there are many subcultures. So in Nursing, there is a med-surg culture and an emergency

department culture and an intensive care unit culture – and within the intensive care unit there is a night shift culture and a day shift culture. This is a contributing factor to "the silo effect" in which the various divisions ("divisions" – the very word implies to divide) within the organization act in ways that are disconnected. Culture can bring down silo walls and promote more effective communication.

The leadership challenge is thus to impose those core elements that are to be required of every subculture, and then to honor those elements that make each subunit special and unique. Returning to the mixed metaphor of silos and patchwork quilts, great organizations bring down the silo walls with shared values and common cultural expectations, weaving together many disparate subcultures into a larger pattern that is both beautiful and functional.

Teach and reinforce practical skills to bolster behavioral expectations

Notwithstanding the title of the bestselling book by Robert Fulghum, your people did not learn everything they need to know in kindergarten. Quite to the contrary, many of the essential skills for outstanding customer service and effective management are not taught in school at any level, right up through MBA training at the nation's top business schools. Thus, it is up to the organization to assure its managers and employees receive this training. The good news is that, because virtually no one else is doing it, this can be a source of real competitive advantage. Values Coach worked with one client that was struggling with a stagnant and negative culture. During a leadership retreat, small groups were instructed to act out a skit in which a toxic employee was infecting a work unit. It quickly became clear that no one on the leadership team had the necessary skills or comfort level to confront that individual. The follow-up action was to conduct training and role-playing on performing this essential management duty. This exercise will help the organization follow-through on its stated expectations regarding positive attitudes and behaviors in its workforce.

Be clear about expectations and consequences

Ultimately, corporate culture is defined by two things: what you expect and what you tolerate, and *over time, what you tolerate will dominate what you say you expect.*

Values Coach worked with one organization that was part of a very large national health system which had a clearly-defined statement of values. Unfortunately, to the proverbial "Man from Mars" it appeared that those values were not being uniformly practiced at the front line level within this organization, partly because managers were tolerating what should have been unacceptable deviances.

During a series of leadership retreats, Values Coach helped the team define first a comprehensive statement of management expectations – what they expect from each other and how they will hold each other accountable for those expectations – and then to refine this into a broader statement outlining both expectations and commitments – one that can be shared with all staff. With organization-specific information removed, this latter document is included as Table 1 below.

TABLE 1

Representative Statement of Behavioral Expectations

Developed with a Client of Values Coach America

We expect excellent performance in every employee's work, *and are committed to* exceeding performance measures to provide the highest quality service to our [community] while also being effective stewards of our resources.

We expect every employee to project a positive and professional image in their attitudes and behaviors, *and are committed to* holding people accountable for treating patients and coworkers with respect and dignity, and for reflecting a high level of pride and ownership in our shared mission of serving [community].

We expect open communications within our organization, *and are committed to* a visible leadership presence and to assuring that our communications have been fully and accurately conveyed.

We expect that employees will take responsibility for their ongoing education, *and are committed to* providing staff with the time, tools, education and training they need to be successful in their jobs.

We expect employees to make efficient and productive use of their time, and *are committed to* keeping a focus on key priorities, minimizing unnecessary meetings and assignments, planning our work so as to reduce stress levels for support staff, showing up for meetings on time and fully prepared for the agenda, and being attentive and courteous during meetings.

> *We expect* every employee to act with integrity, *and are committed to* a zero tolerance policy for dishonesty, abusive or unethical behavior, sexual harassment, discrimination, or theft, and to creating a safe environment where employees can report problems without fear of reprisal.

Know and tell your legacy stories

Stories are the oldest and most powerful form of human communication, and are the single-best way of gaining buy-in to the organization's culture. In the glory days of Hewlett-Packard, "Bill and Dave" stories shaped what became known as The HP Way; the Nordstrom culture of decentralized empowerment is reinforced by stories of associates taking it upon themselves to do things that would get them fired at more conservative stores. Banner Desert Medical Center in Phoenix annually publishes a book of *Stories from the Heart of Banner Desert* that tells stories of caring and sharing. Values Coach is currently working with Auto-Owners Insurance to identify and publish key "legacy stories" as a way of renewing current associates and indoctrinating new associates into the culture that has made the company so successful over the past 90 years.

If stories help to shape the culture of an organization, forgetting the stories can put the organization at risk. Some of the Bill and Dave stories at HP had to do with the fact that HP people were expected to be trustworthy, and to trust each other. Had they remembered those stories, the board chairperson might not have gotten the company into serious trouble when she was caught spying on fellow board members. In making the transition "from good to great," stories help shape a culture that transcends any individual, the way they helped HP move beyond Bill and Dave and helped Disney move beyond Walt. Stories capture the hidden wisdom and institutional memory in a way that policy manuals never will.

Reinforce culture with rituals

Think of rituals as being stories without words – they help to define who you are as an organization. Simple rituals can have a massive impact on culture if they are sustained over time. The early days of IBM were defined by men in blue suits and starched white shirts singing the IBM fight song; the early days of Wal-Mart were defined by Sam Walton leading employees in the Wal-Mart cheer. Today, the culture

of the Texas Roadhouse steakhouse chain is shaped by "alley rallies" in which employees sing and cheer before heading out to line dance with customers.

The culture of the Les Schwab tire empire is shaped by the fact that their tire technicians do not wait in the showroom for customers to come in – they *run* out to greet them as soon as they pull into the parking lot. Rituals have always been an important way for humans to bring a sense of structure and purpose to their work, yet in today's organizations we're too busy for rituals (we've replaced them with meetings). What can you do to restore the spirit and practice of rituals? Not having the time is a poor excuse: the Texas Roadhouse alley rally takes less than 2 minutes.

Mind (and mend) the physical environment

The physical environment profoundly influences corporate culture, often in ways that are not desired by the leadership. For example, if the CEO says that he or she expects people to put customers first and to do "whatever it takes" to exceed their expectations, but then looks the other way at paper signs saying such things as "You can have it fast or you can have it right – choose one," or "The beatings will continue until morale improves," it sends a strong message to both employees and customers that the expectation is not really meant seriously. Remember: over time, what you tolerate will dominate what you say you expect.

Celebrate successes and good faith failures

One day an engineer at Hewlett-Packard had a Eureka moment that solved one of his department's most pressing technical challenges. At a loss for something to immediately recognize the accomplishment, the engineer's boss reached into his desk and pulled out a banana. In the succeeding years, "the golden banana" became one of the most coveted awards given out for innovative accomplishments. At Mayo Medical Ventures, one of the most prestigious awards one can receive is "the queasy eagle." This is awarded for the most spectacularly failed investment as a way of reinforcing the fact that venture capital firms, by their very nature, must accept and encourage risk-taking (though people don't want to earn too many of them!). Southwest Airlines is the most productive airline in the business, but it also has

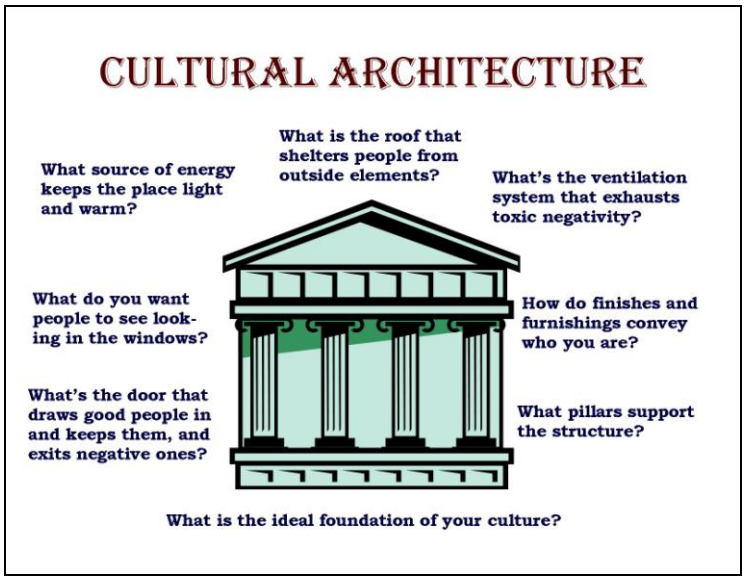
more parties than all of the other airlines put together. Celebrations – ranging from golden bananas and queasy eagles to the company picnic to spontaneous eruptions of joy – can have a highly positive cultural impact.

Make the job description a floor, not a ceiling

"That's not my job" are words that almost automatically connote a negative and disempowered corporate culture. On the other hand, where "whatever it takes" is an implicit element of every job description, there will be a positive and empowered culture. As one example, teaching everyone (yes, right down to the housekeeping staff) how to use Google or other search tools, and then encouraging them to surf for great ideas to enhance their jobs and their departments is one great way of growing people into jobs that grow with them. What more can you do to foster a culture in which people see their job descriptions as simply the main course, to be enriched by adding their own special touch and talents to the basic job expectations?

Have a group actually design your ideal culture

Using a building's blueprint as a metaphor, have small groups work on designing the ideal cultural architecture of your organization. This is a powerful way of encouraging people to think about the kind of organization they want to work for, and the mutual expectations that must exist in order to bring that culture into being.



The best cultures often have paradoxical qualities

Southwest Airlines is famous for a culture in which people have fun – yet it also has the highest overall productivity levels in the airline industry. Auto-Owners Insurance has not had a layoff in its entire 90-year history, yet will promptly terminate even a long-term associate for dishonesty. Cultivating a paradoxical culture is often just another way of replacing "the tyranny of OR" with "the genius of AND," which Collins and Porras say is one of the characteristics of the visionary companies they describe in *Built to Last*.

Move from a culture of accountability to a culture of ownership

Accountability is important in organizations, but it implies having a manager hold you accountable by looking over your shoulder, holding your feet to the fire (think of that metaphor!). In our experience, promoting a culture of ownership is far more likely to promote buy-in and commitment. *The Self-Empowerment Pledge* (reproduced below) is the most effective tool in the Values Coach armamentarium for encouraging people to act like owners, and not just hired hands.

THE SELF EMPOWERMENT

PLEDGE

Seven Simple Promises That Will Change Your Life

Monday's Promise: Responsibility
I will take complete responsibility for my health, my happiness, my success, and my life, and will not blame others for my problems or predicaments.

Tuesday's Promise: Accountability
I will not allow low self-esteem, self-limiting beliefs, or the negativity of others to prevent me from achieving my authentic goals and from becoming the person I am meant to be.

Wednesday's Promise: Determination
I will do the things I'm afraid to do, but which I know should be done. Sometimes this will mean asking for help to do that which I cannot do by myself.

Thursday's Promise: Contribution
I will earn the help I need in advance by helping other people now, and repay the help I receive by serving others later.

Friday's Promise: Resilience
I will face rejection and failure with courage, awareness, and perseverance, making these experiences the platform for future acceptance and success.

Saturday's Promise: Perspective
I will have faith that, though I might not understand why adversity happens, by my conscious choice I can find strength, compassion, and grace through my trials.

Sunday's Promise: Faith
My faith and my gratitude for all that I have been blessed with will shine through in my attitudes and in my actions.

www.Pledge-Power.com

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III. Workplace Environment: The last frontier for quality, service, productivity, morale, and retention

"When someone dumps their toxic feelings on us – explodes in anger or threats, shows disgust or contempt – they activate in us circuitry for those very same distressing emotions. Their act has potent neurological consequences: emotions are contagious… Like secondhand smoke, the leakage of emotions can make a bystander an innocent victim of someone else's toxic state."

Daniel Goleman: *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relations*

As I travel and speak across the country, the question I'm asked most often is some variation of this: "How can I stop the negative people in this organization from sucking the life out of me when I'm at work?" Every time I hear this question, I think it reflects a failure of leadership – but not just leadership by the CEO. It is a failure for which all of us share responsibility. Based upon our observational studies, in the

typical organization up to 10-15% of all paid hours are wasted on toxic emotional negativity as reflected in complaining, gossiping and other negative behaviors. In one midsized organization (3,000+ employees) this equated to more than 30 million episodes of toxic emotional negativity per year. *Thirty million!*

This toxic emotional negativity is, of course, a serious drain on productivity, and it certainly has a negative impact on quality and service. Even worse, it is malignant and contagious. And it's not limited to the workplace; after a day of working in a place suffused with toxic emotional negativity, people can't help but take it home with them to inflict upon their families. One of the most important things that we as leaders can do in our organizations is to raise our expectations of each other, and to reduce our tolerance level for attitudes and behaviors that suck the energy out of a business, and suck the life out of a human being. Eradicating toxic emotional negativity presents a serious leadership challenge, but it's one in which there are no losers and in which the upside potential for productivity enhancement, quality service, and employee morale are enormous.

How-To Strategies for Workplace Environment

Become more intolerant of toxic emotional negativity

Do you remember what it was like to fly in the days before cigarette smoking was banned on commercial airliners? We'd cough and choke and suffer in silence because we felt like there was nothing we could do about it. But what would happen if someone were to light a cigarette on an airplane today? There would be a mini-riot, wouldn't there? That's actually a pretty good metaphor. If you could wave a magic wand and eliminate emotional negativity from your organization for six months (no criticizing or complaining, no gossiping or rumor-mongering), what would happen the first time someone started in at the end of that period? The reaction would be the same as if they'd lit a cigarette – it would not be tolerated.

Ask for the impressions of outside observers

Just as a fish is oblivious to the water in which it swims or a bird never notices the air under its wings, we can become so used to our workplace environments that we don't even notice how negative and toxic they would appear to an outside observer. We might use words such as *caring*, *nurturing*, *compassionate* and *empowering* to describe the cultural climate we think we're cultivating, but based upon objective observations of actual behaviors, the proverbial Man from Mars (or consultant from Values Coach America) might instead use words like *preoccupied, critical*, *self-pitying*, and *disempowered*. In fact, that's a pretty sure bet.

Expect people to be their best selves on the job

It is almost impossible for someone to be what Nigel Risner (author of *The Impact* Code) calls "a psychic vampire" in the cafeteria or nurses station, and then somehow transform themselves into a genuinely friendly customer service representative or compassionate caregiver in a patient's room. One of the two persona is a fraud, and customers and patients generally see right through it. Likewise, the employee who has a negative attitude at work is likely to infect his or her children with the same ultimately self-limiting beliefs and behaviors, raising a brood of Junior Dilberts who will struggle to find for themselves a responsible place in the world of work. Expecting people to bring their best selves to work is a triple win: customers, the organization, and the employee and his or her family all win when people are positive.

Help people win the war with themselves

Thought they might not wish to admit it, negative people are almost always unhappy. The negativity, cynicism, and pessimism are most often reflections of their own poor self-image, low self-esteem, and perhaps even spiritual desperation. The military historian B.H. Liddell Hart wrote that successful commanders always use the indirect approach rather than the headlong frontal assault to gain victory. The same is true in the organization: the best way to promote a positive workplace environment is often teaching people practical skills for overcoming their own negative self-talk and self-limiting beliefs.

Take a light-hearted approach – but mean business

The most effective approaches we've seen for confronting toxic emotional negativity have been simultaneously serious and light-hearted. At one organization, for example, members of the Spark Plug group established the "Grump Fund." Employees who engaged in complaining, gossiping, or other negative behaviors were invited to contribute a quarter to a fund to aid a distressed fellow worker. At another organization, the Spark Plug group placed Pickle Pledge posters in restrooms and called it "potty training." Yet another Spark Plug group has placed signs on office doors with the letters LYPATD – standing for "Leave Your Pickles at the Door." This serves to make people aware of how toxic emotional negativity makes them feel, and how liberating it can be to finally let go of those sour dill pickles.

IV. Projected identity: how your people answer the universal icebreaker question, "What do you do?"

"By observing the behavior of a production floor employee or a senior executive, you can tell what the organization values and how it chooses to do its work. You hear the values referred to even in casual conversation. You feel the values are real and alive."

Margaret J. Wheatley: *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*

The way that people perceive their organization is crucial to the pride they feel in being a part of it, the connection they feel with coworkers and with the work itself, and the trust they have in management and in each other. Pride, connection, and trust are the three key ingredients identified by the Great Place to Work Institute as

the most important attributes of being a great place to work – and they are far more important than mere employee satisfaction. It's the difference between answering the universal icebreaker question with "I'm just a housekeeper," or "I'm a nurse in the Peace Corps" or "I'm an account executive at Enron." It's also a key factor in what Frederick Reichheld, in his book of the same title, calls the ultimate question: "Would you refer someone else to do business with this organization, or to apply for a job working for this organization?"

How-To Strategies for Projected Identity

Be clear about your identity

The more clear your organization is about what it stands for, the more likely it will be to attract and retain the type of people who stand for the same thing. Companies that achieve cult-like loyalty, such as Apple Computer or Harley-Davidson, have a crystal-clear sense of identity and a well-defined brand image. As a result, they tend to attract both customers and employees who are loyal for the long-term. In this regard, corporations are a lot like individual people: the more authentic they are, the more successful they are likely to be. By being clear about your values, vision, and mission, you make sure that you attract the kind of people who will resonate with that identity. The more effective you are at living the values, vision, and mission, the more effectively you will retain those people.

Make orientation special

Ask anyone to recount the highlights of their experience with a company, and it's not likely that new employee orientation will make the top 10. That's too bad, since orientation sets the tone for subsequent experience. But it doesn't have to be that way. Here are several examples of how organizations make orientation special:

> At Medtronics, new employees are given a medallion upon which is engraved company's mission statement. Is there something special (other than a policy and procedure manual) that you can give to your new people as a way of making them feel special to be a part of your team?

At West Central, members of the Spark Plug group "adopt" new employees. They make it a point to take new people out to lunch, walk them around and introduce them to their new colleagues, and generally make them feel wanted and welcome.

Employee orientation at Griffin Hospital now lasts one full week, including a retreat to learn about, and internalize, the Planetree philosophy of empowering and patient-centered healthcare.

Teach people an empowering response to that icebreaker question

"What do you do?" That is, of course, the universal icebreaker question. But the asker isn't really interested in what you *do* ("Well, let's see, I spend about four hours a day in meetings, make about two dozen phone calls, reply to lots of emails…"). What they are *really* asking is how much money you make and where you fall on the social status totem pole. For someone who is perceived to be at the lower end of that totem pole, answering the question can feel very disempowering, especially if the response is perceived as being judgmental ("You're a housekeeper? How interesting. Well, gotta run."). Helping your people come up with a unique response to that question ("Thanks for asking! Have you ever wondered how they keep such a sparkle over at Memorial Hospital? That's what I do.") not only benefits the employee by defusing a judgmental reaction in advance, it is also the most cost-effective marketing your organization can undertake.

Give your people something to crow about

Since the HVLS company of Lexington, Kentucky – which produces high volume, low speed ventilation fans for large buildings – changed its name, sales have doubled every year. Not only that, they now have virtually no trouble recruiting and retaining good people. And all they did was to change the name of the company from HVLS to what everyone else already called their core product. It turns out that lots of mechanical engineers would rather work for a company named *Big Ass Fans* than they would for a company named HVLS Ventilation Systems. But the company did more than change their name. They adopted Walter Perry (known to football fans as "the refrigerator" for the size of his, well, his physique) as a spokesperson, and they

adopted orphaned jackasses as the charity to which they donate proceeds from the sales of Big Ass Fans apparel (a product line sparked by media hype over their name). Any organization can find a way to give people something to crow about, to make them feel special for being a part of something special. All it takes is imagination (and possibly a touch of courage).

Give everyone a business card – especially the housekeepers

There's something about having a business card that marks you as a professional – that makes you *feel* like a professional. Giving people their own business card is a great way to give them something to crow about – especially if they are in a job where people don't usually get to have a biz card. It's also inexpensive marketing – and the more cards people give away, the more free advertising you get.

Create a "fill-in-the-blank" job description

According to research conducted by the Gallup organization, a majority of workers (80% in their findings) feel that they are never called upon to utilize the greatest strengths on the job. One way to encourage this is to create a job description entitled *Fill-In-the-Blank*. Any employee would be eligible to apply and be added to a roster of people who were paid a portion of their time (say ten percent) to share their gifts at work. For example, a hospital housekeeper who enjoyed woodworking could offer to make over-bed reading tables that patients can take home with them. A car salesman who is also an amateur gardener might bring in roses to decorate the showroom floor and send bouquets home with every car buyer. Someone who loves fishing could volunteer to take customers on guided fishing tours (this is actually done at SRC Holdings, the organization where open book management was invented).

Foster a spirit of contrarian toughness

When people quit a job, they often cite stress, burnout, fatigue, and discouragement as factors in their decision – in other words, they think they are miserable. In his book *The War of Art: Winning the Inner Creative Battle*, Steven Pressfield (a former Marine) writes that what makes the Marines so proud is their infinite capacity to be miserable! Put a Marine in a wet, freezing foxhole without enough food or water and

he's happy, because he knows that he's one of the few and the proud who can still function at a high level under such circumstances. That is contrarian toughness. Canadian entrepreneur Raymond Aaron says that life is problems: a good life is new and interesting problems, and a bad life is the same old problems recycling themselves. One of the most important things a leader can do is help people take pride in their toughness, in their ability to tackle difficult problems and knock them off, so that they can graduate to those new and more interesting problems .

Re-recruit your best people on a regular basis

When the recruiting rush is on, the job candidate is made to feel like a Hollywood celebrity. Shortly after they've completed orientation, however, they might start to feel like they're being taken for granted. It begins to feel like a well-worn marriage, where years have passed since the husband sent his wife a bouquet of roses on their anniversary (if indeed he even remembers it). What if, instead, every employee felt like they were periodically being re-recruited, the way a husband might ask his wife out for "a date" on a special occasion, even though they've been married for years? In our experience, that is one of the hidden benefits of Spark Plug training on *The Twelve Core Action Values*: it helps the organization re-recruit people by getting them to think about, and act upon, their values in new and more effective ways. It is a gift from the leadership that recognizes the service of its people.

Conclusion

"We know the only way we can grow as a company is if our associates continue to grow as professionals, and as people."

Roger Looyenga (with Joe Tye): *Take the Stairs*

Jonathan Swift wrote that vision is the art of seeing the invisible. The ideas and the strategies in this Values Coach special report can help you make the Invisible Architecture of your organization more tangible in the hearts of your people, and more visible in the eyes of the communities you serve.

Related Special Reports from Values Coach America:

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