

# CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT:

DEFINING YOUR COMPANY'S  
CORE VALUES AND  
MISSION STATEMENT



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Why do companies like Southwest Airlines, Apple, Zappos, Whole Foods Market, and Google always top the lists of the best places to work? Is it because of their competitive compensation packages? Or an emphasis on open communication and teamwork? Maybe it's the way their leadership teams strive to ensure each employee knows they are indispensable to the company's overall success?

The answer is that it's all of that ... and much more.

Company culture has a much bigger impact on the way your business operates than you may think. Countless studies have shown more often than not that strong culture equals productive, successful companies. Just take another look at the list of companies above. Not only are they consistently recognized for their dynamic, employee-centric working environments, but they are also a few of the most recognized and respected brands in the world.

Fortunately, you don't have to be a billion-dollar corporation to have a strong company culture. And realistically, whether or not it's officially recognized, most businesses likely already operate under a system of implied values. They just need to take the next step and define them.

So, where do you start?



# CULTURE BEGINS WITH CORE VALUES

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Ultimately, what defines a company's culture is the collective behavior of the people in the organization. The driving force behind that behavior is the basic building block of a company's culture – its core values. Core values are personal, ethical, and ideological guidelines that set the standard for every aspect of business operations, from hiring to decision making to strategic planning.

## LET'S BREAK IT DOWN EVEN FURTHER:

### Core values are not:

- One size fits all – just as every business is different, so are the goals and influences that define their individual values.
- Slogans, catchphrases, or buzzwords – your core values must be engrained into the fabric of your organization. Not a passing trend.
- Descriptions of the work you do – rather, they more effectively lay the foundation for how you do it.

### Core values are:

- Unique to your organization – defines why your business is different from others and guarantees a certain level of conduct and expectations.
- Guidelines for decision making – simple and understandable, yet comprehensive enough to guide employees through a wide variety of everyday situations.
- The foundation of company culture – fundamentally, your values need to integrate into every aspect of your business operations.



## DEFINING YOUR CORE VALUES

This is not a one person job. Defining your core values should involve the entire company. From top to bottom, everyone in the organization is a stakeholder and deserves the opportunity to put in their two cents. It instills a sense of ownership and inspires each individual to strive to live up to the guiding principles they helped create.



# ASK PROBING QUESTIONS

Ask your team the following questions to help focus on the key elements that are absolutely essential to the success and longevity of the company.

What do we do? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Why do we do it? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How do we do it? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How are we different from the competition? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What unique services or value do we provide to our customers? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What do we do best? Worst? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What do you enjoy most about your job? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What personal beliefs or opinions guide your performance at work? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What's the one thing we do every day that makes the biggest impact on the overall success of our company? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## NARROW IT DOWN

This is where you really start to close in on the key ideas that will become your core values. From the list of words, look for any common themes and start to narrow the list down to the top 10-15 words or ideas. Then, have each of your employees think about those words individually and rank them from most to least important. You will likely see a few words and phrases emerge as the clear leaders.

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Now you not only have a short list of words and phrases describing the key fundamentals of your company, but because they played a role in defining it, you also have buy-in from your workforce that the words accurately reflect the true core of your business culture.

At this point, it's time for senior leadership to discuss the list of words/phrases and any additional feedback received to hone in on a final list of 3-5 core values. The final list of values may or may not be on the short list above verbatim, but they do need to closely reflect the major ideas that emerged during the meetings with your employees.

### YOUR CORE VALUES ARE:

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Remember, you must have company-wide support of your core values for them to be effective. These are the ideals that will provide a strong foundation upon which you will be able to establish your company culture. So, once you have decided on your final set of core values, you'll want to clearly define and give examples of key behaviors associated with each value.

For example, if one of your core values is "Integrity," you may more clearly define it as:

**Integrity** – Consistency in actions, values, and ethics.

Key Behaviors:

- Always honor commitments
- Take responsibility for your actions
- Provide honest and constructive feedback
- Consistently uphold the core values



# INCORPORATE YOUR VALUES INTO A MISSION STATEMENT

The main purpose of a mission statement is to clearly and concisely answer the question, “Why do we exist?” and to lay out your overall company goals and how you will achieve them. And it does it all in a quick, easily understood – and easily shared – statement. So, it’s important to ensure your core values are reflected in the statement in order for it to be effective.

## SOME EXAMPLES OF STRONG MISSION STATEMENTS INCLUDE:

To organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful.

- *Google*

We will be the easiest pharmacy retailer for customers to use.

- *CVS*

To bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world.

- *Nike*

To bring the best personal computing experience to students, educators, creative professionals, and consumers around the world through innovative hardware, software, and internet offerings.

- *Apple*

To be earth’s most customer centric company; to build a place where people can come to find and discover anything they might want to buy online.

- *Amazon*





# WRITING YOUR MISSION STATEMENT

To help focus your thoughts, keep your core values in mind while you answer these key questions:

What is your product or service? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Who is your target consumer? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How are your products, services, processes, or delivery unique? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Once you have answered the three questions, the next step is to turn the answers into a statement. This part may come easier to some people, but take your time and be very deliberate in your phrasing. You want your mission statement to be both comprehensive and memorable, but not overly complex. Try to keep it one or two sentences in length if possible. A few key tips to keep in mind:

- Don't forget your core values.
- Keep it quick and concise.
- Avoid overly specific jargon and buzzwords.
- Ask your workforce or leadership team for input.
- Think of it as how you would quickly explain everything about your business to someone you meet in an elevator.





It can also be helpful to write several versions of your mission statement and then ask your employees or other company leaders which one resonates and most accurately represents how they view the company's purpose.

Use the space provided below to formulate a few variations of your mission statement to present to your employees, co-workers, and colleagues. If you don't hit the mark the first time, keep reworking and refining your statement until you get it right.



**OUR MISSION IS TO** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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**OUR MISSION IS TO** \_\_\_\_\_

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**OUR MISSION IS TO** \_\_\_\_\_

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**OUR MISSION IS TO** \_\_\_\_\_

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# THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING YOUR VALUES AND MISSION

The time and effort put forth developing your core values and mission statement is all for not without a true commitment to implementing them. Think of it as a rally cry for your business. When your workforce is united around a core set of values and beliefs, there's no limit to what can be accomplished. Your employees will be more engaged and focused on achieving strategic goals, and your customers will know they are working with a company that has a well-defined path toward success. It can boost morale and productivity, and reduce turnover and retention issues. By establishing your core values and mission statement, you are better equipped to assess where your business is, and perhaps more importantly, where it's going.

Contact your local Express Employment Professionals representative today to find out more about how company culture can help or hinder your ability to attract and keep top talent.



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