

Your Guide to Creating Company Values



Sure, all that stuff about company values and culture is important, but what about the numbers? Where are the charts and graphs? What's the ROI?

Culture is tough to put into numbers. Because of that, some leaders and organizations set it aside, choosing to focus on the more tangible parts of the business. What they don't realize is that culture, while hard to measure, is absolutely critical to the success or failure of every organization. In the words of Brad Rencher, CEO of BambooHR:

“ Defining company values and developing your culture are the most strategic things you can do as an organization.

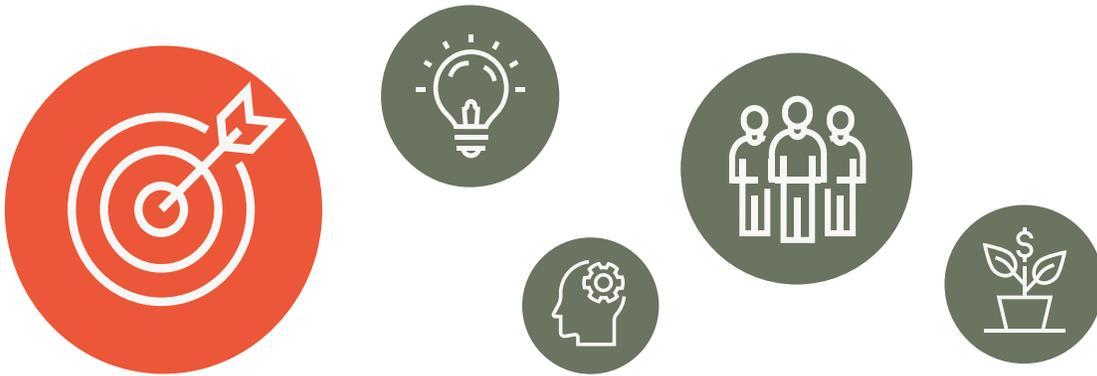


Your company values are the foundation, core, lifeblood, fuel, heart, hitching post, etc. of your company culture. Without them, it's virtually impossible to maintain a consistent, healthy culture, especially as your organization grows and brings on new people.

In other words, company values are kind of a big deal.

In this guide, we'll walk you through how to develop and communicate core values for your own organization. The best time to start this process is yesterday, but it's never too late to begin, whether you're a brand new startup or a company that's been around for a while.

Ready? Let's get this show on the road!



What Are Company Values?

Company values, also called core values, are the beliefs and principles that inform behavior in an organization and thus shape culture.

In [The Definitive Guide to Culture](#), culture is partly defined as “the sum of all that you and your colleagues think, say, and do as you work together.” What that means is your people’s behavior in the workplace defines your company culture for better or for worse.

Values, then, are the guideposts that help your people know how to treat themselves and each other. They shouldn’t be prescriptive rules that try to address every situation; rather, they should be general principles that motivate and guide people no matter the scenario. Whether they’re single words or short catchphrases, they should help everyone in your organization answer one question:

what should I do?



Why Are Company Values Important?

Like we mentioned before, some organizations don't prioritize company culture and company values because they don't see the point. Developing values might sound like a nice idea on paper, but what difference will that make in the day-to-day operations, especially for a small company that's just starting out?

Smarp was one such company. As they explain it, “[d]uring the first three years of Smarp’s existence, we did not have any written company values. To be honest, we did not really see the benefit at the time—we saw them as something big companies have for creating a positive image of themselves, without adding any real value.”

In a small, tight-knit company with just a handful of people, leaving your values unwritten and undefined like this might work for a short time. Your core group of people might be able to stay on the same page without additional guidance. But do you really want to leave your culture up to what might happen?

And the risk of misunderstanding and miscommunication only grows as you add more people to the mix (have you ever played a game of telephone?). Clearly defining and communicating your values to the entire organization eliminates a lot of this uncertainty. People don't have to guess what the company culture is—they just know.

In the case of Smarp, the leaders recognized that, while their unwritten values helped shape the core of their company culture, they “had to be more specific in order to help [their] team make decisions in their everyday work.” Likewise, in **our own survey**, 69 percent of respondents said that company values enhance their company culture—the top answer next to regular communication.

Creating company values, then, isn't just a PR stunt for big organizations. It's a strategy to future-proof your organization's culture and help your people move forward full steam ahead.





How to Create Company Values

Creating and establishing company values is a process that requires dedicated time, careful thought, open collaboration, and intentional communication. What it doesn't require is any special talent or magic words—any organization with the right attitude and level of commitment can follow these three steps to great success.

It's also important to note that these steps can and should be repeated. Your organization is always changing. What's true today might not be true in one, five, or ten years. Don't be afraid to revisit this process again and again to ensure your culture and values are what they need to be at every life stage of your organization.

#1 Evaluate

Before you sit down with your leadership team to brainstorm ideas for company values, you need to take stock of the current state of your organization. This is especially important if your organization is already well established and you're attempting to make some cultural changes.

A good way to start is with an activity we call a culture discovery. This exercise helps you and your team identify the key elements of your organization's culture, both positive and negative, as well as elements you feel are missing. To get the most out of this activity, you and your team should welcome all ideas and thoughts. The more comfortable everyone feels being open and honest with their input, the easier it will be to discover your organization's culture needs.



Keep

Individually, write down all the aspects of your organization's culture that you would like to keep, enhance, and further develop. Share and discuss as a group. These questions may help guide your thoughts and discussion:

- What do people like most about working for your organization?
- What do you highlight about your organization when recruiting someone new?
- What pieces of your organizational culture help you succeed?



Leave Behind

Individually, write down all the aspects of your organization's culture that you would like to eliminate and leave behind. Share and discuss as a group. These questions may help guide your thoughts and discussion:

- What are common causes of frustration at your organization?
- What makes you not want to go to work in the morning?
- Why do people leave your organization?



Add

Individually, write down all the aspects you would like to add to your organization's culture. These are the elements that you feel would make your organization's culture even better if adopted and developed. Share and discuss as a group. These questions may help guide your thoughts and discussion:

- What are the elements of your ideal organizational culture?
- What crucial aspects are missing from our organization's culture?
- What would make your organization a more enjoyable place to work?

You can use the ideas that come out of this exercise to identify some of the core values that are already present in your culture and perhaps those that should be present. After completing this exercise, you and your team should be well prepared for the next step in creating your values.



#2 Define

With the thoughts and ideas generated during your culture discovery, your team should be ready to start putting these core values into words. You may opt for single words, short phrases, or somewhere in between, but the key is to keep things simple and understandable.



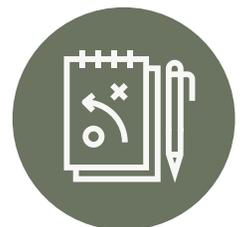
Use Real Words

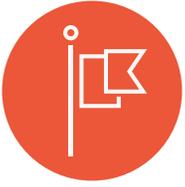
The temptation here for some organizations is to use made-up, foreign, or jargon words in an attempt to stand out and create something unique. However, our very own Brad Rencher explains that this defeats the purpose of company values. “Use real words that your people can understand without jumping through any mental hoops. They should know what your values mean right away,” he insists.

Be Descriptive

While you want your values to be simple on the surface, you should provide a deeper explanation to help your people understand how they apply in day-to-day work. With this extra context, employees should understand how to behave and work together no matter what position or department they’re in—a sales team member should be able to apply the values just as well as a software engineer.

To make this possible, choose words and phrases that embody principles rather than specific actions. For example, “Be Genuine” can guide employees to act a certain way in many different scenarios; on the other hand, “Smile” may not be as helpful in every situation.





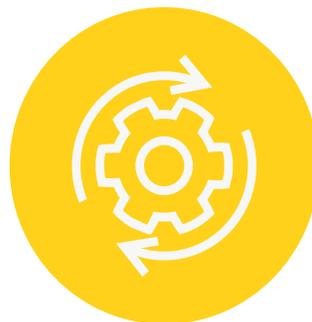
Allow for Change

As your organization adds new people, shifts focus, grows into new markets, and more, your culture changes. “It’s like software,” Brad explains. “Your organization is in a constant state of patching, debugging, and updating its culture. So, while your values should be consistent, their application should be evolving, too.”

This doesn’t mean you need to overhaul your values every year. It means the values you create for your company must have the capacity to evolve alongside your culture without losing their core meaning.

This might sound like a tall order since you can’t predict the future (or, if you can, we have a few questions we’d like to ask...). However, future-proofing your company values is simple if you think of creating, defining, and communicating those values as an ongoing exercise rather than a one-and-done task. You can use our culture discovery activity from the previous section as a way to check up on your culture and values over time. You could also survey your people with these questions:

- Which value(s) is your favorite? Why?
- Which value(s) could you work on? How?
- Are there any values you don’t understand?
- Among our company values, do you feel there are any that people don’t fully embrace?
- Are there any values you feel are missing in the organization?





#3 Communicate

Writer George Bernard Shaw famously said, “The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” Oh, how true that is, especially when it comes to communicating company values in the workplace. After all the work of discussing and defining values, some organizations simply slap posters on the wall with their chosen words and phrases and call it good.

This is not enough.

Don’t get us wrong—we love a good poster (in fact we have posters hanging in our own office with each of our seven values). But failing to communicate your values all the way through your organization, from top to bottom, left to right, turns those motivating, inspiring values into lifeless platitudes. So, how can you make sure that doesn’t happen?

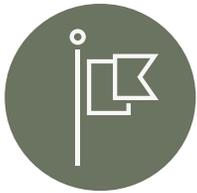
Give Back Ownership

Who owns the company values? Who’s responsible for keeping them alive in the workplace? HR? The C-Suite? Employees?

Let’s go with *D) All of the above.*

While the process of creating and defining values will likely begin at the top with your executive and HR teams, everyone should be involved in some way. Invite your people to offer their thoughts and ideas during the creating and defining process. Find out what values are most important to them and how they believe these values should apply to the workplace. If you do this (instead of imposing your own ideas on them) they will be much more likely to embrace the final product. More than that, they will feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the values that they helped establish.





Live Them Yourself

The best way to communicate company values throughout your organization is to simply lead by example. As Brad explains, “The culture and core values of an organization are just a reflection of the leaders’ core values.” Employees look to their leaders as examples, for better or for worse. If your leaders don’t abide by the company values, then no number of meetings, trainings, posters, or handouts will be able to make up for it.

Not only do leaders need to embrace and live the company values, but they need to evangelize them. A leader who sets a silent example, while helpful, won’t influence their culture as much as a leader who consistently references the values, reaffirms what they mean, and explains how they apply. When your leaders practice this, the values trickle down and become part of your organization’s everyday language, making it easier for employees to understand and embrace them as well.



Recognize Good Examples

Once your people have started adopting and embracing your new company values, you need to put your money where your mouth is. That is to say, you should incorporate the values into your reward and recognition strategy.

Rewarding and recognizing people for living the company values communicates multiple messages at once. First, it expresses appreciation to those who are doing their best to embrace the values, which will encourage them to continue setting a great example. Second, it shows the rest of your workforce that the values are truly important to your organization, which will motivate them to try to live up to those values.





Examples of Company Values

BambooHR

Enjoy Quality of Life

We work hard and love what we do. We also value our relationships with family and friends and make plenty of time for them.

Grow from Good to Great

We believe in helping our employees, and our clients' employees, grow. When you grow your people, you grow your business.

Be Open

We give and receive feedback honestly and without hesitation. Open communication solves problems and sheds light on new opportunities.

Assume the Best

We begin from the belief there is good intent behind words and actions. We seek understanding and we listen without judgment.

Do the Right Thing

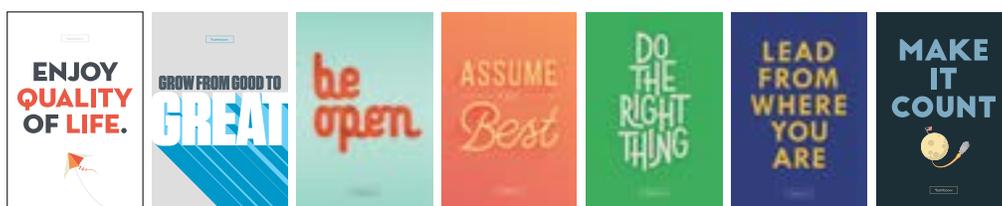
We do the right thing because it's the right thing to do.

Lead from Where You Are

We believe people follow leaders, not titles. Anyone here can inspire others, earn recognition, and influence our direction, regardless of their position.

Make It Count

Hard work got us here and it's the only way forward. We seize every opportunity to be present and make an impact because every second matters.



SnackNation

Health Above All Else

Personal health is everything. Taking care of yourself so you can take care of others is more than okay, it's vital. We believe and support practices that contribute to a healthy body, mind, and spirit.

Display Grit Without Ego

Grit is the stubborn refusal to quit and we've got it in spades. But we're not about winning for winning's sake. We live to give. And we work really, really hard to ensure at the end of each day we gave all we've got. That's our victory.

Serve & Inspire

Focusing only on oneself leads nowhere. Service to others offers genuine fulfillment and uncovers our own greatness.

Seek Perpetual Growth

Becoming is better than being. To change the status quo, you've got to grow. We adopt a growth mindset no matter if we're an intern or CEO. Progress is our only measuring stick.

Spread Joy & Optimism

Joy & optimism make us all rich and we proactively search for ways to spread joy and optimism far and wide. Every day we strive to put genuine smiles on the faces of those we serve. Happiness is our hustle.



Glassdoor

People Matter

Value and respect each other

Integrity

Always do the right thing

Passion

Be committed in heart and mind

Ownership

Treat the company as your own

Accountability

Stay true and walk the talk

Leadership

Shape a better future



BizLibrary

Build Successful Partnerships that Last

We form partnerships every single day. Employees, Customers, Vendors. Each of them are investing in what we do at BizLibrary. We value these relationships and expect to maintain lasting partnerships for years to come.

Freedom to Fail

If you want to do something no one has ever done before, you must take a risk. We value individuals stepping out of their comfort zone and pushing to innovate.

Enjoy the Journey

Where we work and what we do for a living is such a large part of our lives, we owe it to ourselves to enjoy what we do. At BizLibrary, we encourage an open, approachable, and fun environment, where employees can enjoy coming to work every day.

Giving Back

We're fortunate to have the opportunities we have, and it's our responsibility to pay it forward. Whether it's giving money, time, or energy, just 1% goes a long way towards helping the communities where we live and work.

Passion to Be the Best

We value those who want to be the best in whatever they do. We're passionate in our pursuit of excellence, by dedicating our energy to improving everything we touch.

Respect Others

Diversity of opinion and background is an integral part of our success. Wouldn't every company, and the world for that matter, be a better place if we all just respected one another?

7Geese

Excellence

Having discipline, good habits, paying attention to detail, and pursuing excellence through your work.

Positivity

Being enthusiastic, light-hearted, and optimistic.

Growth

Constantly learning, improving, and embracing personal development.

Lending a Hand

Helping others be successful. Spending time supporting and teaching others.



Lattice

Ship, Shipmate, Self

We put the success and wellbeing of the company above the individual. We put the success and wellbeing of our colleagues above our own. We are missionaries not mercenaries. We are all company owners and we act like it.

Chop Wood, Carry Water

The best work is done when we fall in love with the process of becoming great, rather than obsessing over the end result. We recognize that greatness is exhausting, unglamorous, and occurs as the byproduct of faithfulness to our process and passion for our craft. So we work to surrender the outcome and keep persisting after everyone else has gone home and nobody is watching.

Clear Eyes

We approach our work, colleagues, customers, and ourselves with clarity and honesty. We harness pragmatism as a superpower. We believe that starting from a place of truth will make us successful and happy in the long run.

What's Next?

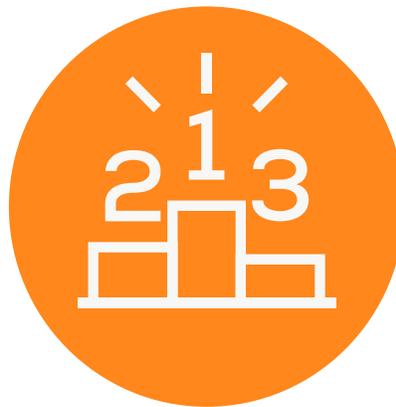
We have an insatiable appetite to grow, to improve, and to look for the next horizon. Whenever we arrive at a destination, we see it as the beginning of a new journey. Our work will never be done.



Make Your Organization More Valuable

At this point, you should be ready to start creating (or recreating) company values for your own organization. And there's no better time than today. Start the process of evaluating, defining, and communicating values now, and make it a never-ending cycle in your organization. As you do this, your values will become more than simple words and phrases. They will matter to your people and guide their efforts, and in the end, your entire organization will stand tall because it will have been built on the strongest of foundations.

So what are you waiting for? Go make your organization more valuable.



**Building a great company culture is easier when
you have the right HR software on your side.**

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