

'Behavioralizing' Your Organizational Values--Part 2

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Two weeks ago, in Part 1, I described that all organizations have values and some allocate the time and energy to identify and describe them. This article describes ways to help anchor the values in the understanding and voluntary behaviors of both existing and new team members.

If your organization has not yet articulated its values, consider referencing “Articulating Your Organization’s Values” on my website. Go to the address below and scroll down alphabetically.

The objective with “behavioralizing” your organization’s values is to create and utilize a simple training process for new members of your team. I encourage using existing team members to create this educational effort. To engage every member of your existing team, simply reproduce the creation process multiple times, each very independently. (This will deliver unexpected benefits for your team!)

Assemble three to five team members for a couple of hours. For each of your organization’s articulated values, have the temporary sub-team identify three real life scenarios an individual might genuinely face during the execution of a day’s work.

For each scenario, identify five possible--and tempting--responses a person might choose. (Okay, if you want to throw in one that is ludicrous or funny go ahead; folks should have fun with this process!)

The ultimate product of this effort will be two or three printed pages. Each value will be stated, followed by the three realistic scenarios, each with its five possible responses. Small teams of new employees will explore the advantages and disadvantages of each potential response.

New employees should be assured this is not a test but an educational process. Still, they’ll need an answer key. So, in addition to developing the scenarios and the tempting responses, the temporary task team should develop that document as well.

For each undesirable response to a given scenario, the team should develop a description to identify why that response might be tempting, yet not appropriate. The response that correlates most closely with the organizational values--and why it’s the best choice--should also be clearly explained.

Recognize that if you do this with multiple groups, you’ll obtain very different scenarios. That’s great! At this stage, you want creativity and divergence of thought. Ultimately, you might share every generated “values quiz” and its answer key with all the members of your team, perhaps as part of a special teambuilding event.

When all (or a critical mass) of your team members have participated in this creation activity, gather two or three of your informal team leaders to work with you to whittle the possibilities down to three scenarios for each organizational value. This is the “values orientation” you will offer to every new member of your team.

By the way, don’t be surprised if, during this process, you identify some enhancements to the current articulation of your team’s values. You might find this “Aha!” to be a very beneficial side effect of the activity. Not only will everyone understand better how to implement your organization’s values, you may actually improve the clarity of some of your stated values.

After much effort with existing employees, you will have generated a couple of pages of a “values orientation quiz” and a couple of pages of an answer key. Now you are ready to start using it with new members of your team. At this stage, you may feel you have created a tool that will live forever.

Not so! Your objective with every group of individuals who now use this document is for them to improve it. Encourage each group to offer a new situation or at least an improvement on some of the tempting options. They'll feel more like accepted team members when they are invited to contribute.

Consider identifying an "owner" for managing this ongoing process. However, I encourage having rotating members of your team administer this educational process to new folks. Here's why.

First, it allows existing team members to re-familiarize themselves with the content and to gain a new appreciation for the articulated values.

Second, it maintains freshness in the "values orientation quiz," because the final act of the incoming new team members is to suggest improvements to the document and the answer key. The existing team member serves the role of initial calibrator, answering the question, "Would the rest of our team agree that this continues to be consistent with our existing values?"

You, of course, and the "owner" of the values orientation process would be the ultimate approver of the enhancements to the "values quiz." Keep in mind that educating new team members is one desired outcome of this effort. Another and perhaps more valuable objective is to continually improve your culture by reinforcing the execution of your organization's desired behaviors.

Though probably obvious, you wouldn't put this orientation quiz on your public website. You might post your values there (so that your customers know what drives your decision-making). However, they need not have access to the training you provide to your employees in how to calibrate daily decisions to those values.

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