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## ***Bond with the company values***

*Provides a solution to the perplexing concept that company values are irrelevant to driving the business, but not for you as a business leader. Gives you practical examples what to really DO to make others think you care about company values.*

This is already an *advanced leadership behavior*. At the director level, you need to master this. Below director level, don't bother. And, believe it or not, now the time has come to have a look at the company folder they gave you on your first day with the organization!

In this section, you we are going to provide you with insights as to why mastering the values game is a *display of maturity* for aspiring leaders, and we will give you a two-step approach fit to impress your management as of tomorrow.

### ***Values are important ...***

To start off, as a director and aspiring great leader, *bonding with the company's values* needs to become a priority for you. Your management and HR gurus will be deeply impressed and will be happy to recommend your promotion to the next level. In principle, *the higher you move up in the corporation, the more time you need to spend on the "values" business.*

That's why very senior people like to spend almost all their time discussing the company's values. As this is so difficult, they often seek help from consulting companies or agencies when doing it.

### ***... to drive your career***

From your personal-development point of view, the challenge is to find the transition point where you need to start to focus on values and stop worrying about the business. Tip: *go for cold turkey!* You may feel a bit uncomfortable on day one, but as you move on, you are going to realize how much fun it can

be to “anchor” every superficial business discussion in a *demonstration of leadership* by talking about the discipline and courage it takes to relentlessly focus on the company values.

In our experience, using words like “discipline” in connection with “courage,” and insisting on “relentless implementation” when talking about the company values is a *perfect testimony to your maturity* as a leader. We recommend you add these phrases to your leadership dictionary.

Now to help you with the transition and truly bond with the company values, we suggest you do two things. First, *we recommend that you know your company values*.

This isn’t always easy, particularly if you’ve worked for more than one corporation over the past ten years. Because they are all the same, company values are difficult to tell apart. Most of them deal with performance! innovation! trust! The one-word value statements are, as you can see, the most insightful and powerful.

Now, in spite of this, most corporations will still claim their values to be their real differentiators and business drivers. This is indeed perplexing and leads us directly to our next point.

Second, *you need to quietly acknowledge that values are irrelevant to driving the business*. They must be irrelevant, since they’re all the same. However, while they may be irrelevant and forgettable for the business, they aren’t so for you as a business leader, because it’s your ability to *make company values come alive* and embed these values in the organization that will give you a great career. In other words, values are important because your HR guys—and even worse, HR consul-

tants—think they're important. *Perception is reality*, so get involved in this value stuff. Yes, we know it hurts.

### ***A three-step approach to embedding values***

Let's have a closer look at this embedding stuff. In essence, bonding with the company values is about three important things 1) making the values come alive for the sherpas, 2) embedding the values in the whole organization, and 3) choosing and continuously displaying a symbol of your personal commitment to the company values.

### ***How to make values come alive***

Let's look at strategies to make your company values come alive first.

The default strategy is that, when talking about the company, its results, or its people, great leaders have the fascinating ability to *celebrate the power of the company's values*. Whenever something worked out, there is an opportunity to attribute this to the power of the company values.

You know what's going on when somebody who has always thought and acted in terms of "me, myself, and I" starts saying things like, "I am so proud to be part of this group of individuals united under the roof our company values."

This is just an example; you can tailor this phrase according to your needs, but the essence needs to be unchanged. You are free to use colorful, emotional language as long as you *establish this passionate relationship between yourself and the company values*.

Another successful strategy to make the values come alive is to *assign magic qualities to them*. We once heard a senior executive advise a director who asked about how to turn a specific prospect into a client, “talk to them about our values.”

Needless to say, the prospect had absolutely no interest in the company’s values; he just wanted to get the job done effectively and efficiently. But great leaders also have the uncanny ability to *think beyond clients’ needs* (yes, it’s the BOO mindset in action again!). No sane director will ever dare say, “Sir, I’m afraid our client couldn’t care less about our values.”

### ***How to technically embed values***

Let’s move on. Now you know how to make values come alive (we’ll provide a few practical techniques below). Our next task is about embedding values in the organization.

Embedding company values has become an industry in itself. Everybody from the doorman to the CEO needs to be able to regurgitate company values at three o’clock in the morning. That’s the objective of the embedding exercise. There are training companies specialized in developing programs to drum companies’ values into their employees.

Taken to the extreme, there are ruthless types who even create events to embed the company values with the employees. The more meaningless the values (“we are passionate, competitive, customer-oriented, global, honest, we value respect, integrity, continual self-improvement, safety, respect for the environment ...),” the more cheesy the narrative, *the more drama you need to create for the event*.

One company we know had its directors run up a hill in South America and hide their values in a tree. They then gathered around the tree, hugged it, and swore allegiance to their values. Rumor has it the tree died soon afterward. But we couldn't confirm this.

Traditionally, however, embedding company values comes down to framed posters stalking employees in the office buildings, or small print on the back of the business cards.

A far more interesting approach we have seen a couple of times is to commission an external agency with embedding the company values. In most instances, they will propose a contest where each employee is asked to write down what each value means to her or him.

And this often turns into a bold venture: The best answers are then presented or role-played by the “winners” at a company function. We think this is a *fantastic opportunity to play around a bit with the video functionality* your new smartphone offers.

### ***Choose a symbol of your commitment***

Here's a tip: use the next town-hall meeting to talk about how important the company values are and *present the stunned audience a symbol of your commitment*. This symbol needs to be something you claim to continuously carry in your wallet as a reminder.

The symbol can be anything, so *don't waste your time thinking about it* a lot. It just needs to fit in your wallet and you need to create a matching “value” narrative around it. For example,

one executive we met always carried a needle on him as a reminder to never become complacent. His story was along the lines that he would always sting himself whenever blah blah blah. You get the idea.

Of course he was as complacent as the next guy, but he never missed an opportunity to pull out the needle and talk about his commitment to this value. It seems this symbol thing hits a nerve with many people, so go and spend ninety seconds thinking about a symbol and the company value you want it to represent.

Practice your story with a sherpa if needed. You can fine-tune your narrative, and, as a plus, exploit this opportunity to download some patronizing bullshit on him.

### *Case study:*

Some of you might find this a bit provocative and far-fetched. So perhaps it makes sense to use your own company as an example and reflect for a moment on your company's values. Wait a second: in case you misplaced the "our values" card, let us give you your top three: leadership or top performance is one, right? Then there's something about innovation, correct? Ultimately, particularly if you work in financial services, there must be something around trust, integrity, or fairness. How many did we get right? Three out of three? And we didn't even mention the obvious ones like "customer focus" or "collaboration/teamwork!"

*Next steps:*

1. You couldn't care less, *but at least pretend to be passionate about what the company makes and sells*, whether it's exhaust fans, paper clips, or detergents. Even in interviews with headhunters, it's important to show this kind of passion: it's always interpreted as a sign of superior leadership. We've seen seasoned managers suddenly become passionate about household cleaning products!
2. Along the same lines, *it is never wrong to also refer to your shop's mission statement when talking about the company values*. Just don't miss this terrific opportunity to reel off some grandiose pseudo-philosophical "why-do-we-exist" bullshit. It always impresses senior guys, because it shows what a reflective character you are. Again, *how you communicate beats what you say!*
3. *Have a look at your company's values*. Hint: you'll probably find them on the company website somewhere. Learn them by heart. As with the example above, practice your new knowledge by reminding your sherpas of the importance of your company values. Use websites like brainyquote.com to illustrate the power of your values through the use of smart quotes from celebrities.
4. *Be prepared to talk about how much you espouse the company values*. Be as trashy and tasteless as you can. We firmly recommend to dry-run this talk, as normal people

cannot go through so many empty phrases without wincing at least once or twice. Success is to deliver this talk and have a tear run down your cheek. This is what superleaders are made of.

5. *Prepare a speech linking your company values to business success.* The HR department will collectively fall on its knees, so give it to them! Make sure to only deliver this address in internal meetings, as prospects and clients really couldn't care less about your values.
6. *Find a symbol of commitment to one of the company values.* Anything that fits in a wallet will do. Your challenge is more to develop an emotional narrative of how much this specific value means to you and how this symbol reminds you of this very day. The cheesier the narrative, the better. Always useful to practice this stuff with sherpas if needed.
7. *Fall in love with an embedding-values exercise.* You can use it over and over again, as most companies commit themselves to the same values. And, in the event you change horses, don't forget to take your "values" scripts with you. They might come in handy!