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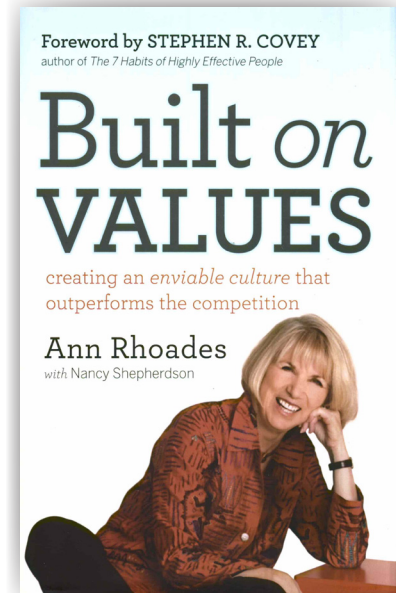
May 4, 2011

Built on Values

Creating an Enviably Culture that Outperforms the Competition

Ann Rhoades with Nancy Shepherdson

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ISBN: 978-0-470-90192-2



INTRODUCTION

Most leaders struggle to create a winning, engaged corporate culture that is the key to attracting top talent and customers—one where everyone from the front lines to the boardroom knows the company's values and feels comfortable and empowered to act on them. Based on Ann Rhoades's years of experience with several companies known for their trailblazing corporate cultures, **Built on Values** offers an action plan for leaders that allows them to create winning environments in which their companies can become better performers, both in customer and employee satisfaction and financial return.

Through stories, examples, and interviews with many of the top leaders she has worked with directly, Rhoades reveals the processes these companies used to create their well-known cultures. **Built on Values** shows exactly how any organization can exceed the

expectations of employees and customers by using actionable step-by-step guidance that demonstrates why it is essential to hire, fire, and reward people based on values.

FOSTERING A CORPORATE CULTURE

Some of the most admired companies in the US have high-performing, customer-oriented corporate cultures. However, each of these companies has a separate and distinct culture—the “perfect culture” or “ideal culture” that companies aspire to do not really exist. What is “right” for a particular company is a culture that has the right fit. Defining the right fit is a process of determining what values are important to the organization's success and committing to them. Deliberately creating a company culture is far superior to just letting the culture grow without guidance. The company must then develop a plan for how its employees should behave based on the defined

values and put it in into practice throughout the organization. The most critical element of fostering the new company culture is helping employees adopt the defined behaviors and live the defined values every day.

Determining the true, underlying values of a company is simple: examine the behavior of its leaders, which more often than not bears no resemblance to the stated values imbedded in the mission statements that appear on Web sites or in annual reports. Simply proclaiming a set of values does not magically change a company's culture if no action is taken to retool the actual values that control day-to-day operations on the front line. Making changes to those inherent values takes considerably more effort and cannot be accomplished by any leader or set of executives acting alone.

Just as there is no perfect culture to aspire to, there is also no one true path to fostering a corporate culture. Simply appropriating values-based programs wholesale from other companies does not work. Great cultures cannot be replicated or copied; a company must launch its own, based on the values the company and its people have determined are best for their organization. A successful culture must arise organically from the organization itself if it is going to fit with its leadership, values, products, and especially with the desires of its customers and the aspirations of its employees. One trait, however, is shared by all companies that create customer-centric cultures: their leaders profoundly understand that people are their biggest asset—and they act on that idea every day. They involve front-line people in decisions and activities to a much greater extent than companies with less successful cultures.

GETTING STARTED WITH CULTURE CHANGE

Most executives know how a great culture “looks and feels,” but they are uncertain about how to implement one. The task is large, but definitely worthwhile. Some clues can tell executives when a culture change is necessary or appropriate: the company is being outperformed in its category, key positions experience high turnover rates, satisfaction surveys of customers and employees are consistently low, or the company demonstrates poor or declining financial performance. Typically, any of these issues can result from

KEY CONCEPTS

Built on Values by Ann Rhoades offers an action plan for leaders that allows them to create winning environments

- The corporate culture should be changed when the company is being outperformed, it has high turnover in key positions, satisfaction surveys are consistently low, or its financial performance is declining.
- By involving employees at all levels, especially front-line people, a company can define a Values Blueprint that codifies the company values and the behaviors that exemplify those values.
- Values are explicitly incorporated into daily operations by tying them to expected behaviors and rewarding employees for living them.
- Basing recruiting, hiring, and firing methods on values attracts a higher percentage of elite employees at all levels of the organization.
- Values-rich cultures depend on leaders who mirror the values adopted by the organization and thus inspire over-the-top performance.



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an ailing culture and can be addressed by changing the culture.

Every company already has a culture, so its executives can begin the change process by letting employees define the culture that already exists. The next step is to identify the culture that will best drive the organization's success. The ideal is a high-spirit culture where everyone is engaged for the good of the company, aiming for the same goals and helping each other succeed. An amazing transformation in enthusiasm and behavior occurs when values and culture

are clearly defined.

There is not one true path to the best culture or even one best culture. One size fits all' fits everyone poorly. A culture that works for you can only arise organically from the organization itself if it going to fit with your leadership, values, products, and the desires of your customers and the aspirations of your employees.

For culture change to be successful, the company must involve its best front-line people to ensure the culture becomes tied to what is most important: giving customers such a satisfying experience that they will do business with the company again and again. The top front-line people are eager to inform their leaders, and they command the respect that will lend instant credibility to any changes that are instituted based on their suggestions. From that initial process will emerge a *Values Blueprint* that codifies the values the company's people agreed upon and the behaviors that exemplify those values. Subsequently, the values can be explicitly incorporated into daily operations by tying them to expected behaviors and rewarding employees for living them.

The Values Blueprint method of changing culture has been used successfully by many companies to create values-rich cultures. These companies are large and small, for-profits and non-profits, and operate in various industries. Even though each company defines its own culture using different sets of values, six fundamental principles informed every successful values-based culture change.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ann Rhoades has been practicing values-based leadership for over 25 years. Her book is based on her experience as part of the executive teams of developing companies, such as JetBlue Airways and Southwest Airline, which are celebrated as much for their values-based, people-centric cultures (both employees and customers) as they are for their excellent products and service. As president of Albuquerque-based People Ink, she helps clients build values-based corporate cultures. Her clients have included businesses in a variety of markets. She is also the CEO of CareLeaders, LLC, a company that provides leadership, workforce, and patient-centered care solutions for the health care industry. She continues to serve on boards of directors for several companies across various industries.

Nancy Shepherdson is a freelance journalist who has written many articles over the past 20 years. She has ghost-written books that focus on business and consumer issues, often with a contrarian bent. Her byline has appeared in several well-known magazines and business trade publications. Shepherdson has an MBA in marketing and finance from Northwestern University and an MA in economics from the University of Michigan.

- 1. A company cannot force culture; it can only create environment.** Culture is a culmination of the leadership, values, language, people processes, rules, and other conditions within the organization. Leaders can only create the right conditions and working environment that will help the desired culture to emerge and flourish.
- 2. The service a company provides to its customers will never be greater than the service it provides to its employees.** A company cannot create a great customer service organization if it treats employees badly. The companies that excel in customer

service also excel in how they treat their employees.

3. **Success is doing the right things the right way.** Redefining corporate values helps companies make better decisions. Clearly defined values and the expected behaviors based on them empower employees to handle problems personally and immediately and simplify the day-to-day tasks of decision making.
4. **People do exactly what they are given incentives to do.** A values-rich culture succeeds when it rewards the behaviors that the company wants, taking into account how those behaviors lead to desired outcomes. Values will be perceived as hollow and meaningless unless the company bases compensation and rewards on expressions of the behaviors that mesh with the values. Hiring, promotion, and appraisal methods must be revised to select people who already display the values that are important to the company.

Even if you think values are unimportant or don't acknowledge them at all, your company's values and culture are actively attracting customers or driving them away. The best people are either knocking down your door or running for the exits. Your employees are either innovative and productive or just getting through the day.

5. **Organizations will get out of this process only what they are willing to put into it.** A company never finishes defining and fostering a values-rich culture; it must always be vigilant against digressions into its old ways. Companies must regularly monitor their progress toward fully implementing the model, developing value-based leadership, and planning for leadership succession.
6. **The desired environment can be built on shared, strategic values and financial responsibility.** Conscious action, beginning with determining a set of shared values, can set up the necessary condition for encouraging a culture that will make an organization a leader in its industry. Those values should also be vetted in terms of responsible fiscal management; however, financial concerns should

not derail the process in its infancy. Culture change will likely save money as turnover and training costs are reduced and customers become more satisfied. Values are most critical when making tough decisions, but that is also when they illuminate the way forward.

DEFINING THE COMPANY'S TRUE VALUES

Cultures develop, regardless of whether or not they are defined. If the values that a company has formally written down do not match the existing culture, those values will be ignored. Employees quickly get to know "how things really work around here." Culture change, therefore, never starts from a blank slate, unless the company has just been formed. However, the experience of many companies has shown that cultures can be shaped in ways that make them more effective drivers of business success.

Before a company can hope to change its culture, it must begin with an objective sense of its current state of function or dysfunction. Assessing the current state

of a culture can be one of the most mentally challenging tasks of the whole blueprint process, because the people in the company are so close to it and are emotionally invested. Leaders must brace themselves to accept survey data that delivers bad news about normal conditions in their compa-

nies. Dispassionate analysis is critical when assessing the current culture and systems.

Information collection for values assessment is most successful when the process relies on four distinct data sources: existing data, customized anonymous surveys, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups. Using all these methods, a company can assess the values its employees display in everyday interactions, their feelings about the current model, and their level of trust in the organization. However, employees and management might be concerned that the data collected could affect their jobs. Others will dismiss the effort as yet another "program" that just gets in the way of doing real work. Therefore, the first step on the journey toward culture change is to communicate what the company hopes to achieve. Being totally transparent, executives can explain why they want to

refine the company's values and make the company a better place in which to work.

The next step is to nominate an assessment team, the members of which should be drawn from all levels of experience and from the most important parts of the organization. The team will decide on the data collection methods and the procedures for analyzing and acting on the results of the assessments. The team begins by gathering important information, such as recent satisfaction surveys, notes from exit interviews, and similar sources. Noting trends in the existing data, the team develops additional surveying, interviewing, and focus group methods to gather additional information. Evaluating the resulting information can reveal problems that upper management had no idea existed. To demonstrate that the Values Blueprint process will be transparent, the team publishes the results, summarizing the current state of the company's values—the good news and the bad. A good, solid assessment of the current state of the company's values and behaviors establishes a strong foundation upon which the company can more easily explain the reasons for change and implement the plan.

CREATING A VALUES BLUEPRINT

After the company defines its current state, it develops a Values Blueprint that elucidates the values and behaviors to which it aspires, using a simple and understandable method. The Values Blueprint must be comprehensive enough to address a wide variety of situations and drive decisions at all levels. A powerful decision tool requires a lot of creative activity to avoid results in which values are generic and vague. The Values Blueprint becomes a powerful tool when values are tied to expected behaviors. Also, when a company finds problems in its culture, it can turn to the Values Blueprint for guidance on how to fix the culture.

To develop a Values Blueprint, the executive team appoints a Values Workout Team to represent all employees as they develop the Values Blueprint. The Values Workout Team uses the assessment of the current culture and input from the executive team to

decide what new values should be created, which existing values need to be reinvigorated, or if some combination of new and existing values should be developed. The team associates universal employee behaviors with the new and updated values, and it publishes the draft of the Values Blueprint throughout the organization to garner feedback and suggestions for improvements. Based on the feedback, the team revises the Values Blueprint and formally publishes it. The company can then start using it to guide changes in hiring, performance evaluation, and rewards processes to align with the company's newly refined values.

No one should be surprised when companies fail to achieve an enviable culture when values do not permeate from top to bottom. A values-rich culture depends on leaders who mirror the values adopted by the organization and thus inspire over-the-top performance. Live the values personally, and you are halfway there.

After the Values Workout Team publishes the Values Blueprint, it begins developing a company-wide implementation plan and timeline. The team's implementation plan ensures that the values and associated behaviors will permeate throughout the organization. The plan should include phases that each department will go through during the change process and a timeline for their compliance with the Values Blueprint—including implementation of new metrics, hiring methods, revisions of reward processes, training, and other activities and celebrations.

FILLING THE COMPANY WITH A PLAYERS

A Players are those employees who genuinely live up to the company's values every day. A Players are not limited to the executive suite, and they are not always the high-flying world-beaters. They are employees who value what the company values and want their company to succeed, helping great companies and great leaders reach their full potential.

After the company declares its Values Blueprint, it should hire *only* A Players (and B Players who have a strong potential to become A Players) *who display the company's values*. This approach to hiring is one of the most vital actions that leaders can take in an orga-

nization. A Players are committed, dedicated, and successful in their jobs. They do more than is required in their jobs, live the company's values, and truly add value to the organization. Leaders sometimes rely on hiring the best available applicants or just hire who they can get because they need a warm body to maintain operations. They risk filling their organizations with C Players or worse; these employees do not fit with the cultural values and therefore never perform well.

The most common reason for failure (among 13,000 senior executives studied) was that they didn't remove low performers from among their direct reports. Anyone not living your values is a low performer who must be terminated. It's really that simple.

Leaders must adopt a new hiring philosophy if they expect to lead high-performing, values-driven organizations. For example, if the company wants to open a new facility, but cannot staff it with A Players right away, it might have to delay the opening until it finds the right people. Employers should always pass on hiring C Players. Time and resources must be spent to alter recruiting strategies to attract better-quality employees. Some theorists suggest it is not possible to fill the entire organization with A Players. They suggest filling the A Positions—mission-critical, revenue-generating slots—with solid performers, and the rest will take care of itself. This approach has flaws; if a company wants to attract and retain more customers, it must concentrate on putting A Players in the front-line, customer-facing roles. An organization will only work as a well-oiled, value-generating machine if the company strives over time to recruit, hire, train, and reward as many A Players as possible.

To start hiring A Players based on the Values Blueprint, companies might want to start with one key position in one department. The position should be one that is vital to customers' perceptions of the company but has been difficult for the company to keep filled. Another factor for choosing the position might be the cost resulting from filling the position with the wrong person. The company can then create a Values Hiring team to work out the values-based hiring process for that position. The team would determine the

key attributes or competencies of the position, possibly by starting with interviews of other A Players in the department or related positions to narrow down the list of key characteristics for success to about five or six traits.

With the key traits list in hand, the team creates an interviewing procedure that is based on values, is more structured, relies less on gut-feelings, and is fair. The interviewing process includes a rating work-

sheet that lets interviewers assess how well the candidate fits the position's key attributes. Because several people will do the interviewing, the worksheet scores can be averaged and compared to results from other candidates.

Members on the interviewing team should include A Players who will be peers to whoever is hired. Managers and HR personnel will also interview candidates. Interviewers should be trained to evaluate candidates with their heads, not because they like them or find them attractive. Interviewing based on behaviors takes the subjective element out of the process. As the new interviewing process is implemented throughout the company, the entire organization should be informed of the changes and why they are important as the company changes its culture.

IMPLEMENTING A VALUE-CENTERED METRICS SYSTEM

Most employees want to work in a place where people care about customers and each other, are fully engaged, take pride in their work, and feel the obligation to continually improve. However, executives cannot just send out an e-mail with steps to creating a new environment. They must carefully tie incentives and rewards to departmental and organizational performance. Leaders can more easily direct employee efforts by establishing value-centered metrics that measure and recognize excellent employee behaviors, not just results. With those kinds of measurements and recognitions, excellent behaviors will arise out of the organization.

A key component of the Values Blueprint process is the design of simple metrics that allow the company's success to be easily understood from the front line to

the executive suite. With these metrics, companies can fully engage all employees in the process of finding smarter ways to conduct company business and then recognize them for doing so. The most effective method to inspire commitment from employees is to develop new dashboards—an organization dashboard and individual team dashboards—that easily summarize key metrics in a simple format. When employees understand the meaning of key metrics and have an immediate stake in the outcomes, they will have a greater interest in influencing them. When given the change to influence the improvement of those metrics, they are likely to contribute in ways that will impact the bottom line.

An organization dashboard will only present those five or so well-chosen metrics where changes in employee behavior are likely to have the most impact. These are the numbers that the company wants the employees to watch most carefully. The most effective dashboards clearly show the minimum, target, and stretch goals for each metric the organization deems most important.

Team dashboards provide every team with time-sensitive metrics to work toward. Containing no more than two or three metrics, they also include scorecards that track daily, weekly, or monthly progress toward the achievement of dashboard goals. The metrics cannot be chosen by upper management; if team members are to accept the metrics, they must have a sense of involvement in choosing them.

In many organizations, tracking efforts can lead to employees trying to cover up errors and mistakes. However, to correct errors, they must be reported and tracked. The key is to set up error metrics so that teams are not in competition with each other. Rewards for error tracking should never be based on minimizing errors, but rather on honest reporting and solving of problems and tracking of correction efforts. Otherwise, teams will have an incentive to “scrub” the data to make it look better—which corrects none of the mistakes.

REWARDING VALUES-BASED BEHAVIOR

Recruiting and hiring A Players is just the first step in creating a high-performing, values-based culture. Companies also have to persuade them to stick around. People tend to stay in companies where they feel engaged. A company can create a competitive advantage for itself among its A Players by differentiating and personalizing its rewards package. With a personalized benefits package, for example, employees who embody the company values and deliver outstanding performance might be content with a modestly competitive salary if they could work at home. Companies will never know what their employees really want as benefits and rewards if flexible options are not part of their rewards packages.

When values-based behaviors are incorporated into the performance review, the organization is saying that values are important enough to be the basis for compensation. Rewards, bonuses and recognition must also be aligned to values, as must promotion decisions and firing decisions. An employee who is not recognized for behaving according to the values of the company is an employee who will eventually stop believing that the values have any meaning whatsoever.

Just as hiring needs to be matched to values, so must performance evaluation and total rewards. Companies must change their performance review process to incorporate values. When values-based behaviors are incorporated into the performance review, the organization is saying that values are important enough to be the basis for compensation. A wholesale restructure might not be necessary; the key component is that peers must be included in the evaluation process. Having multiple reviewers allows all the facts to emerge about an employee’s performance, creating a fairer process. Three to five people can review the employee’s performance and how it reflects the values of the organization.

Total rewards (compensation, bonuses, and recognition) must also be aligned to values, as must promotion decisions and firing decisions. There is no better way to communicate the significance of values in the organization than to tie them directly to total rewards. By focusing on making values an integral

part of their total reward strategy, companies can ensure that their organizations reward employees for the right behaviors. Fundamentally, paying for value-based excellence means remaking the corporate culture and rethinking merit increases. A Players expect to be rewarded for their above-average performance with above-average compensation. If a company wants to retain them, it must have a stated pay-for-performance policy. Additionally, that policy might well include equity plans and incentives that traditionally are enjoyed only by executives. However, in companies where these types of rewards are broadly-based, especially for front-line employees, results have been astonishing.

You cannot force culture; you can only create the environment. Constant communication of the values is the only way to ensure the fierce customer loyalty that is the hallmark of solid long-term performance. Communications that create a desire to exceed customer expectations are more all-inclusive, as strong from the bottom of the organization as from the top, as strong from the customers as toward them.

LEADING IN A VALUES-BASED CULTURE

To successfully achieve an enviable culture, values must permeate the organization from top to bottom. Leaders must mirror the values adopted by the organization and inspire over-the-top performance. Executives cannot be solely responsible for making values come alive in the organization but they need to create an environment in which employees can thrive. Leaders are the strongest drivers of values and behaviors in their organizations. To communicate those values, they need to be visible—interacting with and listening to employees more frequently than is the norm in many organizations. The best CEOs do “rounds” on a continuous basis—setting aside specific, high-priority times to walk the factory floors, office buildings, and other workplaces, meeting and talking with employees.

The top executives of a company should constantly promote the notion that they want to hear from employees about better ways to do things. A simple process for getting employee feedback can convince idea-generators that they are vital to the success of the

business. It should have three simple components:

1. Employees should explain why they think it will save costs or increase revenues if their idea is implemented.
2. Leaders should respond to the suggestions within seven days, providing an estimate of when a final response can be made and possibly getting the employees involved in the investigative process.
3. Leaders should provide employees with the status of their suggestions—whether they will be implemented and why or why not. The response should include a “thank you” from a senior leader making clear that the input from the front lines is genuinely appreciated and encouraged.

More than anyone else in the organization, top leaders must discipline themselves to step back from any contemplated action and map its anticipated consequences against the corporate values. They must examine how their intended actions will affect people in the organization and its customers and whether those effects are in keeping with the company’s Value Blueprint. Leaders have to model the same behaviors they want to see exhibited by those who report to them. When employees have made a strong effort to do something well-aligned with values, leaders should try to find a milestone to celebrate with them in person, sending a strong message that the employees’ efforts are appreciated. These leadership activities can be reinforced and prioritized by including them in executive performance reviews.

COMMUNICATING THE CULTURAL VALUES

Leaders can ensure values are communicated well both throughout their organization as well as to their customers by developing a Values Communication Plan. The effort can be led by the Values Team and should involve A Player representatives from marketing and communications departments, along with selected leaders and A Players from the front lines. The plan lays out how the company is going to effectively communicate the agreed-upon values and behaviors to employees. An effective plan engages

employees at all levels and encourages support of the process. The Values Communication Plan should include communication methods, timelines, budget, resources, target audiences, and the people responsible for specific communications actions. The plan outlines key messages that will be used consistently in communications, linking the core values to the organization's mission and vision. Leaders should ensure all employees are aware of the communications plan and solicit feedback. Strategic plans for corporate communications, marketing, and branding will have to be refocused on values in order to reflect the changed corporate culture in every word that comes out of the organization. The plan also empowers employees to communicate corporate values to customers through their words and actions.

MAINTAINING A VALUES-BASED CULTURE

Organizations that succeed with cultural change over the long term create an intentional plan for continuous improvement. Culture maintenance is as important as culture creation. Leaders need to continue to find ways to improve the customer and employee experience as an ongoing effort to ensure the values and behaviors of the company culture are fully integrated into the company's operating systems. To retain A Players, companies need to continuously "raise the bar." More of the same does not get them excited. They need more challenging goalposts to aim for.

Continuing to implement the Values Blueprint throughout the organization can become the hardest part of culture change. The danger is that, after initial excitement and input of energy, leaders will lapse back into their old ways. A major thrust of the initial implementation phase must include efforts to convince people that this is a new way of life in the company, with the full support of leadership. Everyone must understand from the beginning that the company's culture is changing, that it will not occur overnight, but that it will be a permanent change.

Having an annual review of the Values Blueprint and its component parts will lead to action items and goals to be implemented to keep the organization and individual teams on track for values-based changes. It is also a time to celebrate successes and validate that the leadership recognizes the efforts made toward culture change. Metrics can be revised to better sup-

port the values. Especially, executive performance can be reviewed to ensure leaders are being compensated and rewarded for behaviors that reflect the corporate values.

The final pieces of the puzzle of continuous culture advancement are strategic leadership development and succession planning. Careful planning will ensure that up-and-coming leaders are thoroughly immersed in and invested in the company's value-based culture. Developing those values-rich leaders and enmeshing them into the organization's leadership team must go far beyond typical management training. Looking beyond the typical candidate with the MBA, companies can open up their leadership program to anyone who aspires to move up in the organization. This is not a new concept. Many famous leaders of organizations started as A Players in the mail room. Additionally, new leaders joining the organization must be carefully vetted to ensure they demonstrate the behaviors that reinforce the organization's values.

Living the values in an organization can become a way of life with huge benefits. It can simplify decision making, help company's hire the best people and retain them for years, provide abundant opportunities to astonish customers, and create an unlimited future to sustain the organization. That is just the beginning. Employees will find it very exciting again to go to work each morning.



FEATURES OF THE BOOK

Reading Time: 4.5 hours, 252 pages

Business executives and human resources officers would benefit most from reading this book. The authors explain the methodology that Ann Rhoades has perfected to help businesses around the world build their value-based corporate cultures. The book is meant to be read from start to finish, and includes a "leader's toolbox" stocked with examples of plans, reports, charts, and surveys that can be used with the methodology. Extensive notes and a thorough index help this book serve as a reference source as well.

After reading the book, executives can follow the step-by-step guidance in each chapter to build a corporate culture based on values. Overall, the authors make a strong argument and demonstrate how executives can steer their businesses to develop cultures that are based on their companies' core values, making them highly effective and competitive.

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