

# Why You Should Teach Personal Values in Your Organization

A special report by Joe Tye, CEO and Head Coach, Values Coach Inc.

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I am often referred to as a “motivational speaker,” but we all know that’s an oxymoron: you can’t “speak” motivation into people. What I’ve learned over the years is that the most effective way to inspire people to make personal change is to help them get clear about and act upon their personal values. When a critical mass of people make those choices, they will have a positive impact on the organization’s culture.

While most people intuitively have good solid values (especially those who choose the healing professions for their livelihoods), few have taken the time to actually think about what those values are, much less how they are reflected in behaviors and attitudes, establishing goals and priorities, and dealing with conflict.

In this article I’ll share five reasons why you should be concerned about the personal values of your employees, then summarize the Values Coach course on *The Twelve Core Action Values*, a 60-module course on universal personal values. We provide course participants with a 400-page workbook; you are welcome to download the eBook edition at no charge and share it with anyone who might benefit – [click here to download](#).

## **Five Reasons You Should Teach Personal Values**

*Overcome Performance Barriers:* The collective self-image and self-talk of your people creates an invisible ceiling on the performance potential of your organization. One of my favorite bumper stickers reads: “I used to have superhuman powers, but my therapist took them all away!” Thinking about and acting upon one’s deepest personal values is one of the surest ways of confronting the toxic voice of self-talk and overcoming inner barriers that prevent people from doing their best, giving their best, and being their best.

*Enhance Commitment and Loyalty:* Research by Kouzes and Posner (authors of *The Leadership Challenge*) shows that the more clear people are about their personal values, the more committed they will be to the values and vision of their organization. Furthermore, research by the late Roger Herman as documented in his book *Impending Crisis: Too Many Jobs, Too Few People* shows an almost direct relationship between how seriously an organization takes

values and its turnover rate. Considering the high cost of turnover, investing in values training can have a substantial long-term payback. One of the tools we share with clients is a matrix helping them correlate personal values and organizational values; you can download a blank copy this worksheet at the Values Workbook website.

*Promote Behavioral Expectations:* It is much easier to enforce behavioral expectations when people see transgressions such as gossiping, bullying, and other forms of toxic emotional negativity for what they really are: violations of personal values. Acting upon personal values is the difference between performing because your feet are being held to the fire (accountability) and performing because you are inspired by a fire within (ownership).

*Promote Employee Health and Fitness:* We have seen participants in our values courses quit smoking, lose weight, and commit to fitness regimens when they are finally doing it because they're motivated by personal values rather than because they're worried about the opinions of other people. We've heard from people who have been able to quit taking medication for depression and anxiety because values-training has helped them be more engaged in their work and in their personal lives (the medication most being prescribed for your employees through your employee health plan is probably anti-depressants).

*Enhance Risk Management:* From the collapse of Enron to the current travails of Wal-Mart, virtually every catastrophic failure of business ethics is at root a failure of personal values. When a hospital is charged with inappropriate implementation of cardiac stents, it often reflects a failure on the part of the procedure room team to confront a cardiologist who puts his or her own personal financial interest ahead of the patient.

### **The Values, Behaviors, and Outcomes Continuum**

In my consulting work I've reviewed many organizational values statements and helped facilitate the process of reviewing and revising them for clients. One of the tools we use is the Values→Behaviors→Outcomes Continuum. For example, trust is not a value, it's an outcome. That outcome is earned by behaviors that include honestly, reliability, and humility. And the core value that inspires those behaviors is integrity.

Most of the items included in the typical organizational values statement are not values per se, but rather behaviors and outcomes. Compassion, professionalism, and service are not values, they are behaviors; quality, excellence, safety, and patient satisfaction are not values, they are outcomes. There's nothing wrong with including behaviors and outcomes in a statement of values, but understanding where they fall on the Values→Behaviors→Outcomes Continuum

will help you achieve your desired outcomes by connecting the necessary behaviors with the underlying values that inspire people to think and act in certain ways.

### **The Twelve Core Action Values**

In putting together the course on *The Twelve Core Action Values* we started with the question: “What are the human values that transcend political opinion, religious belief (or non-belief), socioeconomic background, job title, and every other external factor?” We identified a dozen universally-honored values. For each value we identified four cornerstones that put action into the value, and then built the course around this structure. The first six values lay a solid foundation of character strength while the second six are the catalyst for effective action. Here’s a summary:

#### **Core Action Values 1-6: Laying a Foundation of Character Strength**

*Core Action Value #1, Authenticity:* This value is the ultimate source of personal motivation – after all, who wants to be a phony? We ask course participants to contemplate this question: “What would you do if every job paid the same and had the same social status?” At one session, a nurse answered by saying she would write poetry; while quitting her job to become a poet was not an option, the thought she put into that question inspired her to write and share poems with patients and co-workers. The cornerstones of Authenticity are Self-Awareness, Self-Mastery, Self-Belief, and Self-Truth.

*Core Action Value #2, Integrity:* Every organization either implicitly or explicitly states integrity to be a core value (even Enron claimed it), but there is always a gap between the words and actual behaviors. For example, if an organization’s culture tolerates gossip, bullying, and other forms of toxic emotional negativity then the integrity bar has been lowered. The cornerstones of Integrity are Honesty, Reliability, Humility, and Stewardship.

*Core Action Value #3, Awareness:* In *Notes on Nursing*, Florence Nightingale said that the ability to acutely observe is more important than compassion or clinical skills in determining quality patient care. Awareness is the essential ingredient of employee engagement and the antidote to most medical mishaps caused by disengagement and carelessness. Awareness is also a fundamental ingredient of emotional intelligence and personal happiness. The cornerstones of Awareness are Mindfulness, Objectivity, Empathy, and Reflection.

*Core Action Value #4, Courage:* Fear is a reaction, courage is a decision. Especially in today’s uncertain world, it is essential that we teach people practical skills for living with courage in an age of anxiety. I have been participating in a LinkedIn dialog on lateral violence in

healthcare facilities started by LeAnn Thieman. It's clear from the conversation that many organizations need to do a better job of teaching people how to stand up to bullying, rumor-mongering, and other forms of toxic emotional negativity. The cornerstones of Courage are Confrontation, Transformation, Action, and Connection.

*Core Action Value #5, Perseverance:* In his beautiful book *The Last Lecture*, Randy Pausch wrote, "Brick walls are not there to stop you. They are there to make you prove how much you want something." Much has been written recently about the pressures on rural critical access hospitals, which are being forced to prove how much they want to continue providing a solid range of clinical services for their communities; one of the key elements of their ability to survive and thrive in the future will be the cultural toughness to not quit emotionally. Perseverance is the skill that keeps us focused on the end goal which lies on the other side of the brick walls. The cornerstones of Perseverance are Preparation, Perspective, Toughness, and Learning.

*Core Action Value #6, Faith:* When we speak of Faith as a value, we're not talking about religious belief; everyone needs faith. Faith in oneself is essential to personal and professional accomplishment, faith in other people is essential to bringing down silo walls, and faith in the future inspires us through the difficult times of today. The cornerstones of Faith are Gratitude, Forgiveness, Love, and Spirituality.

### **Core Action Values 7-12: Taking Effective Action**

*Core Action Value #7, Purpose:* In his book *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren reminds us that "it's not about you." Helping people identify and act upon a personal sense of purpose that transcends making a living is often the first step toward fostering a culture of ownership in your organization. At Columbus Regional Hospital in Columbus, Indiana every employee carries a card upon which they have written a personal mission statement that describes how they see their contribution to the organizational mission. The cornerstones of Purpose are Aspiration, Intentionality, Selflessness, and Balance.

*Core Action Value #8, Vision:* Vision is the art of seeing into an invisible future, of making one's purpose real and tangible (at Values Coach we talk about creating "memories of the future"). Shared vision has built great organizations, put a man on the moon, and conquered dread diseases. When Tucson Medical Center revised its statement of values in 2009, CEO Judy Rich wanted them to "honor traditions and nourish dreams." To make the values statement visually attractive, they created a beautiful graphic design (you can see it [at this link](#)). In their article about accountable care at TMC, Kathleen L. Carluzzo and associates wrote: "In order to

engage staff across the hospital, employees were invited to participate in rewriting TMC's core values. In this process, they were asked, 'Who are we?' and 'What do we stand for?' The core values are now posted throughout the hospital." ("Tucson Medical Center: A Community Hospital Aligning Stakeholders for Accountable Care" The Commonwealth Fund Case Study Series, January 2012). The cornerstones of Vision are Attention, Imagination, Articulation, and Belief.

*Core Action Value #9, Focus:* Focus is the essential discipline of transforming the vision of tomorrow into the reality of today. It is a particular challenge in today's ADD world, which makes it all the more important that leaders teach people the skills required. A blending of Focus and Enthusiasm (the next value) constitutes a left-brain, right brain formula for enhanced productivity. The cornerstones of Focus are Target, Concentration, Speed, and Momentum.

*Core Action Value #10, Enthusiasm:* I am increasingly convinced that Enthusiasm is the master value – people who are highly enthusiastic get a lot done, while people who lack enthusiasm simply don't. As shown by companies such as Southwest Airlines, Zappos, and Les Schwab Tires, an enthusiastic workforce is an incredible source of competitive advantage. An organization filled with enthusiastic people will beat one staffed with bored drones every time. The cornerstones of Enthusiasm are Attitude, Energy, Curiosity, and Humor.

*Core Action Value #11, Service:* Service is a value; it's not just "what you do," it is the *attitude* with which you do what you do. Last year I was asked to speak at a conference of operating room managers whose theme was "It's Not Florence's OR Anymore." While agreeing with that theme in a technical sense, my central message was that when it comes to compassionate service, most of our hospitals need to be *more* like Florence's. The cornerstones of Service are Helpfulness, Charity, Compassion, and Renewal.

*Core Action Value #12, Leadership:* Management is a job description, leadership is a life decision. Anyone who practices Core Action Values 1-11 will become the kind of person who influences and inspires others, which is the best definition I know of being a leader. The cornerstones of Leadership are Expectations, Example, Encouragement, and Celebration.

## **Conclusion**

Hospitals and health systems are under enormous pressure to reduce costs, improve processes, and promote accountability. These are important things to do. But the best investment any organization can make is an investment in people, including helping them be

clear about and act upon their personal values. *The Twelve Core Action Values* provides a template for helping people accomplish this. And sharing this workbook will be a gift to your people as well as an investment in your organization.

**Other resources:**

[The Cultural Blueprinting Toolkit](#) features six webinars and workbook that walk your team through the process of creating a plan for your organization's Invisible Architecture™ of core values, corporate culture, and workplace attitude. It features practical tools and strategies for both personal transformation (essential for helping people think and act like engaged owners) and for cultural transformation (with the goal of building a culture of ownership on a foundation of values). You can also subscribe to the Values Advisor Consulting Service for an ongoing infusion of ideas, information, and inspiration.

[The Florence Prescription: From Accountability to Ownership](#) is both an engaging story and a manifesto for fostering a culture of ownership in hospitals. The book is available for just \$5 per copy (making it the perfect gift for National Nurses Week and Hospital Week). The Florence Challenge website also features free resources to optimize the investment, including leader's guide, study guide, webinar, and certificates.

The [Values Coach website](#) includes information about the Values Collaborative, webinar bundles, Joe Tye's speaking programs, and other resources.

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