

VALUES - DRIVEN LEADERSHIP

by Angus M Robinson, Past President, Rotary eClub One

Arguably one of the most important tasks a good leader must perform is to develop and maintain an agreed values-based culture within the organisation.

For political leaders, the headlines of the values system might relate to social welfare or environmental aspirations; for business, it might mean a commitment to customer service or community engagement or even just as pointed at enhancing shareholder value; for Rotary leaders, it is of course a commitment to 'service above self' and the 'Four Way Test'. Once a 'values system' is communicated to stakeholders, the challenge for effective leaders is to always be seen to 'walk the talk'.

But woe is the leader who professes the organisation's values system and fails to become a devoted disciple. Stakeholders and joint owners of the values system characteristically watch and observe everything that a leader does or says.

In a business setting, absolute adherence to the tenets of the values system is essential so as to maintain the loyalty and the commitment of the workforce to follow whatever course is laid out by the leader in attaining the corporate vision and achieving the agreed corporate goals. Time and time again, we see high profile chief executives failing their organisations by displaying behaviour which is inconsistent with the agreed corporate values system. And yet one of the reasons that leaders are paid high salaries should be to compensate them for being exemplar adherents of their corporate values systems.

Before my retirement from working full-time as an employee of a 'not for profit' organisation in the capacity of Chief Executive, I had the opportunity to work with my team members to develop firstly a shared values system (exemplified by '10 Tenets'), and then to lead that organisation, being judged on a daily basis by the team as to how I personally embraced these beliefs through my executive actions and behaviour.

This process served up plenty of challenges, but in the end, I think that the team and I always kept faith with what was agreed in the first place, without any amendments over the entire period to any of the agreed tenets, even though there were inevitable staff changes taking place. The 10 tenets of our values system are now shared with some brief rationale for their adoption.

1. Service to members is the number one priority.

As a membership-based organisation, this tenet was key to maintaining the financial viability and growth of the business. Members defined our daily priority. Thus an absolute commitment to customer service is and has always been, in my mind, a fundamental truth for ensuring successful business outcomes, which in our case included more than doubling the

membership over the eight years, and based on annual benchmarking surveys across the industry association sector, being measured as performing well above average in membership service delivery.

2. People are our most important resource.

So often voiced by many businesses as a core belief, but more often than not backed up by real evidence delivery of superior employment benefits, a commitment from executive management and directors to retain staff during difficult times, and investment in staff training.

3. No compromise in quality.

Our organisation worked very hard to achieve excellence through quality assurance in the delivery of all our work outcomes including our communications, our written reports and submissions to government. For project managers where the dynamics of scope, timing and resources could be varied, it was always taken as a given that there was to be no lessening in the quality of the delivered outcomes.

4. To err is human.

Or simply put, 'only chocolate is perfect'!

Empowering employees to make decisions on their own account or for 'front-line' team members to solve customer problems immediately without recourse to a supervisor invariably lead to mistakes being made. But employees need to know that management will always support their mistakes and use the opportunity to point out how situations can be handled differently – in this environment, people can learn from their mistakes without fear of retribution.

5. We achieve our goals through teamwork.

No man is an island! Collective problem solving and 'all hands to the pump' are effective means of dealing with daily work priorities, particularly when addressing the needs of valued customers.

6. We value diversity.

In other words, our recruitment practices are not constrained by a desire to bring into the work place people just like us! We recognise that all individuals are different, have different motivational requirements, have different personalities, can come from different social backgrounds and often don't have English as their first language. If they are capable of doing their job and share the same workplace values system, they will be accepted as valued team members.

7. We embrace change.

Change in our fast moving world is a given and all is around us, and appears in many manifestations. We also embrace and welcome change in our work place as an evitable consequence of the changing needs of our customers.

8. We value individual effort.

Whilst we enjoy working as part of a team, we understand and recognise that those who work hardest in the team deserve rewarding and those that just prefer to 'drift along' can not be surprised if they get rewarded less than those who strive.

Our organisation's remuneration scheme was based on three levels. The first level provided salary differentiation based on seniority and skills level. At the second level, employees were eligible for an incentive payment based on the achievement of agreed team and individual key performance indicators. At the third level, employees were eligible to receive a bonus, at the discretion of the organisation's Board, if the organisation has performed well and 'better than budget' throughout the operating year.

9. It's results that count!

In our organisation, management never measured inputs but only outcomes. We were not concerned where or how a team member achieved the desired outcome, nor did we waste resources or time micro-managing individual inputs. We encouraged teleworking and flexible work hours, so long as each team member kept faith with then organisation in at least working the contract hours per week. The end result of this approach demonstrated that motivated people always end up putting in the extra hours to make sure that the job is done!

10. We value a happy, healthy and safe work place.

Adherence to OH&S 'best practices' was embraced and over-sighted regularly by the organisation's Board. Hazard identification was encouraged and adjustments made continuously to improve work practices and to make the workplace a safer place. Team members all shared the view that a safer and happier work place led to higher levels of output and productivity.

The organisation's leader is the guardian and the 'trustee in chief' of an organisation's values system.

When we think about Rotary's core values system of 'service above self' supplemented by the 'Four Way Test', we can understand that as assigned leaders of our vocational calling, we recognise that membership in Rotary is based on a member's vocation, with each club striving to create a microcosm of its community's business and professional world.

Through vocational service, Rotarians are expected to exhibit leadership in their communities by a number of key tenets, principally by adhering to and promoting high ethical standards in all their business dealings, recognising the worthiness of all useful occupations, and by contributing their

professional expertise and skills to addressing societal problems and needs.

Rotary is indeed a fine exemplar of values-driven leadership!

About the author: Angus is the Managing Partner of Leisure Solutions® which offers a range of strategic services which includes new product development in the area of ecotourism and geotourism.

In recent years, Angus has undertaken a range of senior management roles including as Chief Executive of AEEMA Ltd, a peak national industry association, as inaugural General Manager of the Australian Technology Park in Sydney, and as the General Manager of The Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering. Angus is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management and a Fellow and Chartered Professional (Management) of The Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy. A committed Rotarian since joining initially the Rotary Club of Sydney in 1994, Angus is proud to be a Paul Harris Fellow.