

The ABCs of Work: Values

Law Department Management

Career Development



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Is there a formula for success at work? Are there simple rules that you can follow to increase your chances of getting what you want? Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau thinks the answer is yes. In this series of articles, *The ABCs of Work*, he shares the formula with you.

Greetings readers and congratulations! Simply by virtue of being here you are already on the path to increasing your odds of success. While luck plays a gigantic role in life, that does not mean you are helpless to control your fate. If you want to think of it this way, the tips we'll explore are ways to increase your odds that luck will find you.

Today we explore the importance of **Values** at work, both for improving your performance but also enhancing your life.

Last time we explored why it's critical to understand the Utility in your work so you can deliver the greatest value. Today we discuss how to think about Values in the work context.

What does your company value?

Let's start with your company's values. Why? Because your company has, most likely, helpfully written them out in a corporate values statement.



Everyone likes working with people who share their values. Artwork by JOAT / *Shutterstock.com*

Now, it's unlikely your company will put anything unseemly in their corporate values. So, you might think, why bother? But you should study them carefully with several questions in mind.

- Do the corporate values reflect what management and employees really think? Do they accurately capture your company's culture?
- Or are there unstated rules? Values that people demonstrate that you'll find listed on no company website?
- Perhaps people feel the rules are applied unevenly. That is, some people violate the rules and get away with it.

The ideal situation is where your company's stated values match the company's culture and those values are followed by all.

What do you value?

Having examined your company’s values, you’re now able to consider your own. How important are things like integrity, hard work, respect, collegiality, dependability, reliability, courage, gratitude, sustainability, well-being, balance, kindness, humility, transparency, honesty, and more?

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You need not write your own values statement, but it may help you to list core values that are important to you. You’d like to see some overlap with your values and the company’s values. And hopefully no outright conflicts.

Values don’t change with the weather

Here’s why this exercise is important: you will not thrive in a company whose values diverge too much from your own. And although in-house counsel are well-positioned to shape and reinforce culture, change is hard fought and takes time to accomplish.

Just like company values are slow to change, ours don’t change that quickly either. So, it’s critical to both know yourself and know what you’re getting into at a new company.

When I saw how important cultural fit was to new employee success, I changed my interview approach. I stopped trying to sell applicants on the company’s virtues. I spent quality time laying bare our warts. “Here’s how we really are, and here’s how we behave each day. This is what you’re going to find when you come to work here. How does that grab you?”

There’s nothing worse than joining a company on false pretenses. A company with high-minded ideals and values that go unlived in practice. That breeds disillusionment and leads to turnover.

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At the same time, it’s a delight attracting other like-minded colleagues whose values resonate with yours and your company’s. Everyone likes working with people who share their values. When you feel this alignment yourself, you will be happier and more satisfied with your life overall. What’s not to like?

Honorable mentions

Leveraging a single tip to drive work success is a heavy lift, even a tip as important as understanding how your values enhance your work and life. Our formula will necessarily be incomplete. But the formula has impact, and all the more so because we’ve kept things simple. Here to finish are some honorable mentions to serve as food for thought.

Venal — When discussing personal and corporate values, it pays to understand that some people and some organizations are prone to venality. That is, they are tempted by bribes. I hope you encounter only few venal people and companies. But be aware they’re there.

Verisimilitude — That's just a fancy word for saying the appearance of being true or real. People must know that you are genuine and honest. That you will tell the truth, especially about the hard things.

Very — Adding the word very doesn't enhance your writing very much. In fact, it very often makes you less persuasive. So, I very much recommend you consider omitting every very.

Be well.

Question, comment? Contact Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau.

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Bellerjeau served for two decades as group general counsel for Mettler-Toledo International Inc., an S&P 500 company with its worldwide headquarters in Greifensee, Switzerland. He then led Mettler-Toledo's global Sustainability program for several years through June 2021.

Bellerjeau shares thoughts on how to live a good life at Klugne. You can also follow him on LinkedIn.