



# HOW DO I LINK MY COMPANY'S **VALUES** TO **OUTCOMES**?

BY **CRAIG RUPPERT**

**A** There's been much written about the importance of developing a distinct company culture. Like many of you, for the first 15 years we were in business, we didn't have the time or the energy to think about our culture, let alone develop a formalized mission or values statement. We were just operating an everyday business, keeping our customers and employees on board and trying to succeed and be profitable.

It was only after we achieved a certain level of success, with about 70 employees and geographic expansion, that we started to figure out we needed to develop consistency. We learned we had to further define what made us

Ruppert and develop scalability around those ideas to ensure others within our

expanding organization understood the principles we believe are important to our success. It was then the term "culture" popped up in our vocabulary for the first time. We started to look closely at what made us unique and what beliefs set us apart from our competition to help us continue to grow and succeed.

As with most organizations, no matter the market or industry segment, our key values centered around quality, customer service,

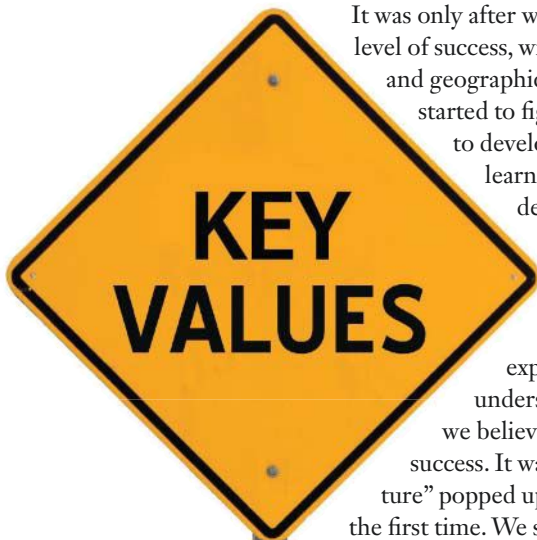


employees and profitability. We carved out 12 core values that are important to our success and supported our culture. Once you determine your beliefs and document them (about 5 percent of the exercise), the real work can begin (the other 95 percent of the equation), which is getting your employees to understand those values, believe in them, adopt them and make them their own. Here are the steps you can take to link company values to outcomes:

**Start from the top down.** As a manager or company owner, it's important to lead by example and live by the company values daily. That means adhering to the same standards you expect from

**Safety, measurement and documentation are a big part of the Ruppert Landscape culture. Here, a crew undergoes a weekly vehicle safety inspection.**

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PHOTOS: RUPPERT LANDSCAPE, ISTOCK INTERNATIONAL INC.



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your employees, such as maintaining a certain work schedule, wearing the company uniform or driving a company vehicle. One of the best ways to reinforce your expectations is to set the standard by your actions so others can model the behavior.

**Structure your values with policy.** When you get busy, even your best-laid plans fall by the wayside. You meant to call your mom or planned to schedule a lunch meeting with a vendor to discuss a project. Often, the items on our to-do list that aren't urgent become less of a priority when schedules become busy.

One way to ensure important tasks are receiving the attention they deserve is to build structure around them. If you say your people are your most important strength, be sure your policies reflect that. How will you ensure your employees are successful, knowledgeable and happy? Some examples include structuring training programs and guidelines for when you expect them to happen or regularly scheduling employee-appreciation events, which can be as simple as a lunch or happy hour after work to something more elaborate like an awards banquet or whitewater rafting trip. If you set goals and policies to ensure you'll take the time to follow through, you're more likely to succeed.

**Measure what you expect.** As you try to tie your values to your organization more closely, measure and document important areas to provide a point of comparison because it will be more clear where your successes and challenges lie. Putting numbers around

**Clockwise from top left: 1).** Ruppert schedules companywide employee appreciation events, such as awards banquets or picnics, to show team members their contributions are valued. **2).** Because Ruppert values people development and training, it tracks whether new employees—such as the group participating in this new field managers orientation—receive their training in a timely manner. **3).** The safety incentive program rewards company field managers and branches that demonstrate their commitment to safety. Ken Thompson (left), Ruppert's Virginia Landscape Construction branch manager, accepts a check and award on his team's behalf from Dave Sanders, Ruppert's safety and loss prevention manager, for being the company's safest branch of the year.

anything that's essential to success might help underscore its importance. If providing excellent customer service is high on a company's value list, then performing yearly customer surveys might enable a company to better understand what's going well and what isn't. If a company's principles center around people development and training, it's valuable to track if new employees are receiving their orientation on their first day on the job and existing employees are receiving their evaluations in a timely manner. Putting employees first also might be measured through turnover rates or employee job satisfaction surveys.

**Reward what's working.** You might have heard the adage, "You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar." That saying has implications in almost all areas of life, including the workplace. While it's important to be looking for areas where someone can be coached for improvement, it's just as important, if not more so, to recognize someone

WHILE IT'S IMPORTANT TO LOOK FOR AREAS WHERE SOMEONE CAN BE COACHED FOR IMPROVEMENT, IT'S JUST AS IMPORTANT, IF NOT MORE SO, TO **RECOGNIZE PEOPLE FOR WHAT THEY'RE DOING WELL.**



AS A MANAGER OR COMPANY OWNER, IT'S IMPORTANT TO **LEAD BY EXAMPLE AND LIVE BY THE COMPANY VALUES DAILY.**

for what they're doing well. Recognition can be as informal as saying thank you with a quick pat on the back, taking employees out to lunch to

congratulate them for a good job, presenting a formal award to them at an awards banquet or giving them a bonus.

If an organization values creating a safe work environment, incentivize that behavior by rewarding employees who are promoting hazard awareness or the team or branch that has consistently demonstrated their commitment to the company's safety culture through compliance or achieving the lowest incident rates. If an organization values employee longevity, do something special to acknowledge significant company anniversaries. Consider giving a monetary reward or hosting a celebration that recognizes significant achievements in

an area of importance.

As you look for ways to differentiate your company from the competition and stand out as the best choice

for customers and employees, develop a set of values and ethics that will serve as a guide. By practicing the values from the top-down and adding structure, measurement and evaluation into the mix, along with a willingness to look at the process and ask difficult questions, you might be more likely to succeed. With the essential ingredients covered, there's a better chance your employees will be infused with principles you believe are crucial to your company's long-term success. **LM**

*Ruppert is CEO of Laytonsville, Md.-based Ruppert Landscape. Reach him at info@ruppertcompanies.com.*

Planning pointer

Once you determine your beliefs and document them, the real work can begin, which is getting your employees to understand those values, believe in them, adopt them and make them their own.



## WHO'S IN CHARGE OF YOUR FLEET?

A fleet manager **PURCHASES** all vehicles, trucks, and equipment, **SCHEDULES** maintenance, **FOLLOWS** the latest technology trends and software, **MAINTAINS** the fleet budget, **IMPLEMENTS** safety standards, and **PROVIDES** technical support for your operation.

*Do these responsibilities fall onto you or one of your employees?*

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