

THE CULTURE FIX

Bring Your Culture *Alive*,
Make It *Thrive*,
and Use It to *Drive* Performance™



WILL SCOTT

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Will Scott



Culture Czars®
Core Values to Valued Culture™

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Dedication

Dedicated to Hugh and Shirley Scott
who initiated my values journey and to
Sam and Chloe Scott who will continue it.

Oh would some Power the gift give us,
to see ourselves as others see us.

—ROBERT BURNS

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Foreword

THE CULTURE OF A community, a country, a company, is its emotional lifeblood. It is an unseen force that guides and influences key interactions between people who keep businesses and organizations running. The tone and nuances of those interactions fuel the productivity of the employees, and thus the success of the company. Good chemistry and culture can bring great results to the bottom line, while a toxic environment can sink even the biggest company. Ignore developing a culture at your company's peril. Without a healthy culture, you won't be getting the best out of your business, your people, or your customers.

The impact of corporate culture is something I have witnessed throughout my executive career with BMW, Rolls-Royce, and Land Rover North America. These companies would not be the global behemoths they are without robust values. Strong cultures create strong brands. As a leader, it's not enough to hold personal values in your mind. They must be made memorable and lived daily in business processes and relations with teams and stakeholders. Consistent principles that are disseminated widely and pursued intentionally build foundations that underpin a business and a brand. Core values are fundamental components of creating worth and memorable customer experiences; without them, a business is unmoored and weakened. A strong living culture is essential for growth, value, and profit.

Well-defined and leveraged corporate culture is integral for outperforming competition. It is the single most import-

ant area of emphasis because it's the prioritization and the context that informs all decision-making. When the right people are working in a consistent direction, it enhances relationships within teams and with customers. In my decades of experience, one factor remains the same for all companies regardless of size or niche—people want to feel like they are part of something valuable. As a business or organizational leader, you have the opportunity to create this experience for your teams.

Though building culture seems abstract and therefore intimidates many business leaders, Will has created an accessible guide for taking core values and turning them into a valued culture. Within the pages of this book, you will learn how to take your own ephemeral values and turn them into a concrete culture that benefits every person who comes in contact with your business or organization. In breaking up the process into digestible, easily attainable steps, he is making it easier than ever for businesses and organizations to create strong cultures.

Using *The Culture Fix*, leaders will have the advantage to push their businesses and organizations to their fullest potentials. We are fortunate to have Will offer us his insights and guidance on going from simply having core values to truly turning a valued culture. I know this book will give readers the confidence and wisdom they need to become Culture Czars.

—Peter Miles, Former President of Rolls-Royce North America, Chief Operating Officer of BMW of North America, Executive VP of Land Rover North America, and Founder of Visionary Automotive Group, LLC.

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For others, however, you might not feel engaged at your workplace. Recent Gallup research shows that the majority of employees—51 percent—are disengaged and have been for quite some time:

The U.S.—and the world at large—is in the midst of an employee engagement crisis.

“Employee engagement has barely budged over the past decade and a half. From 2012 to 2016, employee engagement increased by just three percentage points. The U.S.—and the world at large—is in the midst of an employee engagement crisis.”¹ I know from experience how challenging it is to dislike the working environment wherein you spend much of your time. My hope is that this book encourages you to become a Culture Czar and champion a change in your organization that will transform it into a place you value.

1 Gallup, “State of the American Workplace,” 2017.

I'd like to thank all the colleagues I have worked with in my companies including Waer Systems, Lextech Global Services, and Culture Czars. I acknowledge all the leaders and C-suite executives who understand that culture creates loyal employees, efficient teams, and higher growth and profitability. To those leaders who have invested in culture and deliberately nurtured it, thank you for caring and for providing great environments for your teams. I have learned so much from the leaders with whom I have partnered—especially Rod Scott, Nicki Scott, Alex Bratton, David Snelson, Peter Miles, and other fellow leaders in my own companies.

To my clients, *sawubona*—I see you. I am grateful for your deliberation and for the value you place on creating Culture Czars. Your Churchillian efforts have yielded admirable cultures, tremendous growth, and greater profitability for the companies you lead. The *abundancia* that you demonstrate daily is reflected in your families, your teams, your colleagues, and your customers. You truly are leading a culture, not just a company. I'd like to mention a few who particularly helped me bring this book to fruition: Kitsa Antonopoulos of Lumiere Children's Therapy; siblings David, Bob, Meaghan and Aimee of SABRE; Kevin Hundal of Atrend; Mike Stratta and Jake Hoover of Arcalea; Tim Heitmann of Double Good; and Chris and Brian of Matchnode.

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Introduction

From Core Values to Valued Culture

*Had I to good advice but listened,
I might, by this, have led a market,
Or strutted in a bank and clerked
My cash account:
While here, half-mad, half-fed, half-shirted,
Is all the amount.*

—ROBERT BURNS, THE VISION

IT WAS “BEER-THIRTY” ON Friday afternoon at the Lextech offices. As president and integrator of one of the fastest-growing software companies in the country, I was in a fun mood, dressed in a black mask and shiny, dark cape. I was waiting in the conference room for my design team—or dream team, as they were known. We’d been using the weekly meeting to play Pictionary and brainstorm possible personas around our company’s five core values, in order to bring them to life. We came up with a fictional band of superheroes based on our values that we dubbed *The Core*. On this afternoon, we’d be talking about our value of putting clients first.

The Core had quickly taken on a life of their own, and our staff took it upon themselves to gift me with a set of costumes, one for each core value character. The gesture showed that we were headed in the right direction. Thanks to the artistic talent of one of our designers, we also now had visuals

to go along with our verbal character sketches. A cape-clad Captain Client led the team with his commitment to *clients coming first*. *Exude passion and energy* became Passionista, a can-do wonder of a woman. *Deliver success* was represented by Danny Deliver, a courier astride a cheetah. A buff Scotsman named Grow'n represented our commitment to strong *growth*, while invincible twins Tea and Wok demonstrated the epitome of *teamwork*. The personas added dimension to the words, while conveying our unspoken commitment to diversity. Many companies put their values into words, but ours had definitely taken on a new dimension. This took us several steps beyond simply having core value statements.

As we sat there, recalling the evolution of hunches into clearly defined sentiments, and phrases into full-color, larger-than-life superheroes, we felt the imperative of living the values they represented more strongly than ever. Bringing these bedrock goals into the company lexicon was showing us how powerful they could be. Our company's identity was evident to anyone who looked our way.

I witnessed this the night before from my seventeen-year-old daughter, Chloe. We'd been talking in the kitchen about a family friend's enthusiasm, when Chloe blurted out, "That's just what Passionista would do!" I was intrigued and asked her whether she knew what the persona stood for. *Passion and energy*, she quickly answered. Chloe had never worked a day at Lextech, and I wondered how many more of our core values she could recall. She suspected I was testing her, but obliged by naming every character and the value each represented. I was pleasantly surprised. I knew most employees in most companies could not name their own core values. Bringing them to life, as we had done with *The Core*, appeared to be a game changer.

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Like my daughter, many people are visual learners. In fact, the Social Science Research Network, estimates that sixty-five percent of the population are visual learners.² Expressing concepts through imagery lets people connect to them emotionally and commit them to memory. The same is true for stories. Even without drawings, having characters put into story forms creates a context that helps people understand them. Stanford University's Robert E. Horn, best known for his development of information mapping, asserts that in our currently fragmented world, combining images with words is a powerful integration tool for groups and organizations:

People think visually. People think in language. When words and visual elements are closely intertwined, we create something new and we augment our communal intelligence....Visual language has the potential for increasing human 'bandwidth,' the capacity to take in, comprehend, and more efficiently synthesize large amounts of new information. It has this capacity on the individual, group, and organizational levels.³

Wearing a mask and cape may seem a bit silly on the surface, however, my reasons for doing it were serious. As Horn's research has shown, I wanted my team to not only be aware of our company's core values, I wanted to integrate them into our communal experience. You can't just tell employees to *feel*

2 Bradford, William C., Reaching the Visual Learner: Teaching Property Through Art (September 1, 2011). The Law Teacher Vol. 11, 2004. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=587201>

3 Robert E. Horn, "Visual Language and Converging Technologies in the Next 10-15 Years (and Beyond)" (Paper presented at the National Science Foundation Conference on Converging Technologies for Improving Human Performance, Dec. 3-4, 2001).

something. You have to help them feel it. While core values mark the ideals by which you do business, living those ideals is the only way to show every member of the organization how earnestly you take them. The team and I certainly took them seriously, and as a result, Lextech grew 650 percent in just six years.



My first work experience was vastly different from the conference room of Lextech's 24,000 square feet of office space in Downers Grove, Illinois. My first job was on a farm in western England. Though it was a tough job that required working seven days a week for minimum wage and lodging, it was a valuable endeavor. I appreciated working amidst the daily rhythms of nature and caring for the animals. This was the time I started fully appreciating the writing of Scottish poet Robert Burns. Burns' poetry had always inspired me because of its reverence for the natural world. During my daily responsibilities on the farm, I felt akin to the ploughman poet in a new way. Like Burns, I was deeply engrossed in the natural rhythms of the world around me. I could see the profound magic held in the flora and fauna, the cycles of the animals, the erratic beauty of changing weather. What's more, I began to appreciate the message behind his poems, especially *The Vision*, which sought to preserve the dignity of Man. I understood on a new level that Burns was asserting that all men and women, regardless of occupation, were equal and worthy of respect. Though my responsibilities on this English farm were sometimes menial, like mucking out the barn, I understood what Burns was saying: my work still felt noble.

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Furthermore, the farm owner had values that I easily related to and lived by every day. We were a great team, and I was totally committed to him, the farm, and its animals. I tirelessly worked long and hard days, yet my journals from the time record my deep satisfaction with my life and chosen endeavor. I imbued the pride that I thought Burns spoke of in his poem, “Strive in thy humble sphere to shine.” Furthermore, I felt confident in this job. I remember understanding my supervisor’s priorities and what to do when the unforeseen occurred. Although it might not have been glamorous, the farm was a successful business, and one could tell just by seeing the way it was cared for.

A year later, I worked on a different farm as a part of my schooling and had a wildly contrasting experience. There was little direction and discipline, poor leadership, and no sense of values, or at least none that I related to. The result was chaos. Workers were not aligned and there was high turnover. Oftentimes, workers would just stop showing up. Many didn’t seem to take any pride in their work. I realized that I had lost the dignity that Burns spoke of—not because the type of job changed, but because something more ephemeral was missing. The contrast was obvious and stuck with me. I decided then to maintain a determined path toward dignified work environments, because they can drastically affect the way one feels about work, and ultimately, one’s self.

This lesson stayed with me as I finished college and worked toward an MBA. With each job that I held in the interim, I saw how a leader’s values affected his/her workforce. After finishing business school at the University of Southern California, I worked for a privately-owned American company with the challenge of expanding their export markets overseas.

This company was void of values and structure, and when the management team asked the owner for direction, little was given. It was easy to fail and hard to succeed because no one knew what attainment looked like. Noble initiatives to bring progress or success to the organization were criticized to the point that innovations were stifled. Without directions or goals, there were no ideal behaviors, conflict resolution, or overall purpose. Those who risked the least survived because it was an environment that was disinterested in change and lacked any sense of teamwork or cooperation. Today I know that core values and a core purpose would have helped the environment immensely, but at the time, I tolerated the lack of a defined culture alongside my coworkers.

Not long after, my brother Rod presented me with the opportunity to start a new company—a spin-off from his aerospace component distribution business with some brilliant logistical concepts at its core. In 1999, we started Waer Systems. As a small team we built amazing software that has run mission critical supply chain operations for companies like Airbus and Bombardier for much of our twenty-year history. We evolved as technology and markets changed, and in the last few years made a pivot to being a Built for Oracle Net Suite partner, specifically in the Warehouse Management space. We now have installations in many different industries all over the world and are adding new customers at a rapid pace. I learned about working with family too, which had its own particular joys and challenges. (This experience would prove invaluable as I later assisted family-owned companies with their cultures.) Together my brother and I rode the highs and lows of closing deals with billion dollar companies, raising millions of dollars in venture capital funding,

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managing boards of directors, struggling with cash flow, and all the other challenges of a small start-up. Nevertheless, we never missed an opportunity to celebrate, and we never lost sight of our familial and individual values.

At Waer Systems, I started thinking a lot about the environment of a work place. Not just the physical space, but something intangible that manifested in tangible results—happy employees, less turnover, more efficient teams. I thought back to my work on the farm. I recalled that the most important precursor to a bountiful harvest came months before with the cultivation of the soil and the planting of the seeds. Cultivating the soil was a tending period that happened before the harvest. I saw firsthand that taking the time to nurture the soil had a direct correlation with the health and success of the crop.

From the disparate work experiences of my youth and early adulthood, I recalled that whether I was on a farm or in a conference room, the cultural environment made a direct impact on my satisfaction and success. In fact, the word *culture* comes from the Latin word *cultura*, meaning to grow or cultivate, and was often used in reference to the care of soil. I realized that taking this principle off of the farm and into the workplace could produce the same results.

With this in mind, I thought about Waer Systems. I wanted to develop the culture so that we could reap lasting benefits in the future. What was interesting was that although we were a geographically diverse team, our core values and defined culture helped us operate effectively, even though we were operating on three continents. Twenty years later, this company continues to flourish, and many of our initial employees are still thriving with us.

After building a culture based on values at Waer Systems, I was eager to try the same process again. In 2010, I partnered with Alex Bratton in Lextech, a mobile app software development company. This is where I honed the corporate culture experiences I share in the following pages. It became a fast-growing and successful company with core values and attention to culture at its foundation.

Helping struggling, divided corporate cultures transition to successful, united companies through the application of effective core values is what led me to design and offer the 9 Deeds in 90 Days workbook to other companies as part of my Culture Czars program. In 2016, I became a consultant and business system implementer to other fast growing entrepreneurial companies, and I continue to see how the program leads to more successful companies with more fulfilled and dedicated work forces.



Now, let me ask: What's the toughest conversation you've had to initiate as a business leader? Was it with management colleagues over setting a course for the future? Maybe it was with human resources personnel about letting someone on the staff go? Or, more seriously, have you had to lead a significant downsizing? Whatever the topic, it probably wasn't the first tough talk you've had, and it definitely won't be the last. Difficult conversations stir negative emotions, which often get in the way of doing business. Corporate executives, supervisors, and anyone with the title of "boss" feel the pain that surrounds emotive issues—or issues that people take personally—more

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deeply than the rest of the world might think. It's not because every one of us is thin-skinned; it's because we know we'll be spending inordinate amounts of time on thorny issues that carry emotional baggage rather than attending to more relevant concerns. Furthermore, if the matter is left unaddressed the issue will fester and gnaw away at our subconscious. People problems detract from business operations and bear large costs in time, money, and worry. You may not be able to fix other people's problems, but you can change the environment into a healthy workplace culture that supports and addresses personal and professional matters.

Focusing on culture, on the other hand, eliminates ineffective patterns, sets a more positive course, and then *perpetuates that course* all on its own. That's the beauty of leading a culture instead of just leading a company.

To build or rebuild your company's culture, you must make a similar priority—you have to put culture above all else. However, most business leaders don't think in terms of “culture first.” It's hard not to get caught up in internal issues, recurring problems, and glitches in what you thought were proven strategies. In addition, there are market shifts, Human Resources (HR) trends, and other external factors that can mentally drain a leader. Trying to wrestle with these concerns piecemeal will only cause repetition of the issues. Focusing on culture, on the other hand, eliminates ineffective patterns, sets a more positive course, and then *perpetuates that course* all on its own. That's the beauty of leading a culture instead of just leading a company. With a little preventive care and maintenance, healthy cultures run autonomously,

leaving you free to focus more on growth and the big picture. When you put off those difficult-yet-necessary conversations because just thinking about them gives you a queasy feeling in your gut, your core values will guide you and empower your dialogs. They will strengthen your ability to step into a room and have that talk go a lot more smoothly. Later in the book, I'll show you how to plan and execute such conversations by referencing your core values.

No matter the number of employees, the diversity of the group, or their location, by putting culture first, a leader's job is made easier. Many CEOs start out with a grand vision for the future, only to become trapped in day-to-day details. This might be a metaphor for the world at large. Our global society is so segmented and concerned with petty issues that our human potential is barely realized—leaving the majority of individuals feeling unfulfilled.

In a 2018 study by Mercer, called the Global Talent Trends Study, they received input from 800 business executives, 1800 Human Resources professionals, and more than 5,000 employees from 21 industries across countries. With almost 8,000 people surveyed, the study determined 3 factors that create a successful and efficient workforce: workplace/schedule flexibility, commitment to health and well-being, and working with a purpose. In fact, the study showed that employees were 3 times more likely to work for a company with a strong sense of purpose.⁴ The Culture Czars program may not be a panacea for all that is implied here, but it will certainly provide many of the key pieces that will ensure your employees are cared for in these three important areas of workplace satisfaction.

4 Mercer, "Mercer Global Talent Trends 2018 Study," <https://www.mercer.com/our-thinking/career/global-talent-hr-trends.html#>.

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We have the cure—we simply have not made administering it a priority. What if we did? If the world were an enterprise, and if it adopted the techniques known to strengthen culture—such as building trust and establishing open communication—then many personal problems would melt away. Our teams would find the purpose they are desperately seeking in work environments and the world would function efficiently, with workers knowing their purpose, being empowered to pursue it, and getting better at what they do.

I believe this is possible on a global scale because I have seen it work on an individual business scale. Even as a child, I sensed that being intentional about culture would produce an environment where everyone had the opportunity to reach their potential, or at least reach *for* it. My lifelong attraction to creating environments where people thrive eventually prompted me to make it my life's work. Now I offer this methodical approach toward attaining a truly value-added culture.

How I Became a Culture Czar

We all begin to shape our personal values through trial and error when we are young. We innately gravitate toward certain passions and priorities, even though they may not make sense at the time. I grew up in Zambia surrounded by the natural rhythms of life. Many of the lessons I learned were surmised from my observations of the world around me, helped by my father whose love of nature and the outdoors was infectious. One value he passed to me was a love of trees, including Africa's iconic baobab trees. I recall riding through the bush with my father as we guessed how many hundreds or even thousands of years each tree had existed. Known as “the tree of life,” the baobab trees provided shelter

and nutrition for humans and animals. The most interesting feature was the tree's ability to withstand drought. Inside its massive trunk, it stored hundreds of liters of water that could help it survive even the harshest drought conditions. Not only did the tree have the capacity for self-preservation, it could also be tapped and used to satiate humans and animals alike. These massive symbols of timelessness, reliability, stoicism, protection, and selflessness later came to represent one of our core values at Culture Czars. Eucalyptus and mango trees grew in our backyard and they became places where I fulfilled an early passion: building clubhouses in trees. These spaces always had rules, or as we call them in the corporate world, values.

Whether it was a treehouse, a fort on stilts, underground cave dwelling, or sophisticated bamboo hut under a mango tree, there was one constant: people to gather in them. I would create these little, enclosed worlds and invite my friends to share them. Anywhere people gathered, though, there was potential for drama, friction, jostling for power, selfish motives, and contentious points of view. It was important to me, having put the effort into creating these environments, that my friends didn't trash them, disrespect them, or of course, reveal their locations. So, I set rules and posted them—much like the popular posters of core values that you'll see in many of today's businesses—to keep us all on the same page. I decreed: *No littering; Be nice; Keep this place secret*; and, of course, *No adults "aloud."* Little did my peers know, those early experiences foretold my life's mission: *to create environments where people thrive*. Even at that formative age, I was defining my role as a potential Culture Czar—a leader who strives to exemplify a group's core values.



One of my early forts complete with retractable ladder, circa 1970

Looking back, I realized that posting fort rules was part of establishing bonds with my friends. We were in an exclusive club, bound by our agreed-upon policies. We knew what the boundaries were, how to interact, and ultimately, how each person could be a successful member. This also created a common experience for my visitors and

guaranteed the most fun for the most people. Was it also a little bit controlling? Or was I inadvertently setting myself up as a leader who was ready to take responsibility for the group's well-being? Probably both. The rules kept me—club president and peer—from having to constantly police my friends. Instead of grumbling about picking up trash, I could just point to the sign and say, “We all agreed not to litter.” Done. Short conversation, no argument, everyone felt better. Furthermore, if friends were being mean to each other, I could simply remind them, “We agreed to be nice.” I didn’t have to reprimand, cajole, or teach during awkward moments of conflict. All I had to do was refer to a standard that we understood and were committed to.

Only later in my life did I fully understand the impression that my early structures had on my life. In creating dynamic environments for my friends, I wasn’t just building forts. I was communing with these “trees of life” that served as powerful reminders that a cultivated foundation was essential for strong growth. Even in drought conditions, the trees endured, not because of what they displayed externally, but because they had a rooted, unshakable core that could provide the sustenance they—and their communities—might one day need. In many ways, these trees, and the forts and structures I built among them, were my earliest lessons on how to build healthy communities and cultures.

Why Invest in Culture?

At a Young Presidents Organization (YPO) event in Chicago several years back, I had the opportunity to share my Culture Czars mission with Simon Sinek, author of *Start with Why*. His response was, “That’s great; but why?” I should have known this would be his retort. I replied, “So they can

be the best that they can be.” And he said, “That’s better.” What began as “creating environments where people thrive” was completed as “so that they can be the best that they can be.” My life’s mission suddenly had a purpose, and I was lucky enough to have it crafted, in part, by the best in the business! As I have come to understand the value of living a life aligned to one’s purpose and knowing the power one feels from it, I have tried to define this purpose even further. This led me back to the poetry of Robert Burns. As I mentioned, I had been drawn to Burns’ reverence for the natural world ever since I worked on a farm. Thinking on it with my realized “why” in mind, I began to see my connection to Burns as something much deeper—it wasn’t just the natural world he lauded; it was the plight of the common man that he extolled. Each of his poems, including *The Vision*, resonated with me because it celebrated equality. I realized that from the time I was a boy building forts, I too had sought parity among my peers. I wanted to create spaces where all were welcomed and equal.

That’s the “why” of The Culture Fix—to stick up for employees so that they might love where they work and why they work. I want men and women to leave their jobs feeling good about their day’s work, whether that is on a farm in England or in a C-suite office in NYC. No matter the work, each day is an opportunity to appreciate the joy of work alongside others and to make meaningful contributions to the world. Reading through *The Vision* with this concept in mind, I realized why Burns’ vision for the culture at large resonated with me so much. We want a culture that is inclusive, connected, and steeped in values. For this reason, Burns’ poem *The Vision* has continued to inspire my “why” and is the reason you will see stanzas of its modern English

translation reprinted throughout the book. Though the original Scottish dialect can be cumbersome, the ideas behind the words inspire me daily to contribute to the wider culture by cultivating the cultures of as many companies as possible.

What my conversation with Sinek helped confirm for me is that believing in a concept is the start, but naming it is powerful too. Just as my innate drive for inclusivity was just a jumble of unrealized beliefs before I invoked it verbally, so a company's values are merely concepts until they are fully actualized. How does one make these concepts into fully actualized core values? Through *The Culture Fix* and its 9 Deeds in 90 Days.



Why culture? It's simple—no other initiative brings greater rewards for all members of a team. For the price of some team-time and a few bucks in printing, developing culture:

- Requires a low capital investment
- Produces the highest return
- Is one of the most rewarding experiences you can have alongside your team

We'll talk more about tangible return on investment (ROI) in later chapters. You may be a hard-driving CEO who cares about results, but it's okay to have some fun and feel good about it. Not only is it okay, your team will love you for it, stay with you longer, and give you more. Now, that's a healthy environment in which people desire to work.

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Healthy cultures make companies thrive. Companies with broken cultures merely survive, or even fail. What's the cultural difference between thriving versus surviving? In survival mode, resources are stretched thin, staff are stressed out, employees leave, while replacements stall performance and cost money. The trickle-down effect soon hits your customer base. Furthermore, clients can sense the desperation of survival mode. As Julie Mitchell, founder and CEO of Torq Ride, shared with me in an interview for the Culture Czars podcast series *From Core Values To Valued Culture* (see the Products and Services page at the end of book for a link to our podcast series), culture affects every facet of a company, from employee fulfillment to client satisfaction:

[Culture is] the feeling or the experience that you have when you interact with the brand. And I don't see it as something that's limited to the employees of a company. I think the culture lives in the experience that the customers are having as well....I really think about the culture as something that works regardless of who the audience is—whether it's the suppliers that you're working with, the staff, or the customers—they're all part of that culture experience.

Cultures fail, or lose their authenticity, when their underpinnings are forgotten. One company that is often lauded for its culture is Southwest Airlines, which has grown into the country's most successful airline. Much of the company's success began with Co-Founder Herb Kelleher's leadership style that gave employees input in decision making. With an emphasis on Southwest's people, Kelleher advised, "Orient your mission statement in terms of how you want to treat

your internal and external customers. That makes it both meaningful and eternal...if you focus on your people, your mission statement is eternal.”⁵

Maybe Southwest’s focus on people began with the idea of having a fun-loving attitude, but it’s clear the values established in the beginning have persevered throughout four decades of unparalleled success in the airline industry. They had leaders who understood that putting culture first—which is really putting employees first—pays off in extremely valuable ways. Hiring better “fits” improved performance, retention, and greater transparency. This resulted in higher functioning teams and more accountable staff. These intangible improvements produced real results like fewer recruitment headaches, less office drama, and superior work outcomes, which ultimately translated into better revenues and happier people who were excited to come to work.

Your investment is largely a matter of commitment. You commit to doing some honest thinking, to carving out time to get the process in place, and to making a modest financial investment. These will soon be repaid with exponential returns. You’ll see gains associated with higher productivity, better customer relations, and stronger employee attendance and retention to name a few. There’s no need to take a class, get certified, or be an expert in anything other than what you are already doing. It all hinges on identifying and articulating your values.

Any smart business makes investments in its greatest assets, so if you believe people are your greatest asset, com-

5 *How Southwest Airlines built its culture*, YouTube video, 5:35, posted by World of Business Ideas, October 20, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_CeFiUkV7s&feature=youtu.be.

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mit to it. Investing in culture *is* investing in your people. It lets you use them to their best advantage and full potential. Bringing culture alive in this way helps people thrive—so they can drive your business to the top.

Investing in culture *is* investing in your people. It lets you use them to their best advantage and full potential.

Results You Can Expect

Imagine how easy it would be to get your staff involved in culture if you told them they could:

- 🎯 Work for more than just a paycheck
- 🎯 Know that their personal traits are valued because you hire employees for how well they will fit in with the group
- 🎯 Increase their job security by knowing what success in their role looks like
- 🎯 Be empowered to make decisions by using core values as guidelines
- 🎯 Be part of something greater than one person or one company

Besides knowing that you are responsible for those specific benefits, you can expect big personal and professional changes from your new culture-first mindset. Not only will you see the changes in the contentment of your workforce, you will also find that you are leading a more competent and united team, thus making your own schedule and workload more streamlined and efficient.

As the leader of a culture-first team, you'll be able to:

- 🌀 Give tough conversations finite boundaries and clear-cut resolutions
- 🌀 Educate and empower employees to make decisions in line with values, rather than having to delegate or authorize individual actions
- 🌀 Free up your time for executive duties by relying on qualified staff members
- 🌀 Be more accurate and successful at hiring for cultural fit
- 🌀 Give your clients something to believe in

As Simon Sinek said, “People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it.”⁶ Using the foundations I have honed during my own experience as a corporate leader, I offer the same perspective and framework to other leaders. It doesn’t matter what type or size of your company or organization, I have seen the 9 Deeds in 90 Days initiative benefit small businesses and large corporations alike. Here’s how you can use what you are reading *right now* to become a Culture Czar—a leader who exemplifies a company’s core values—and jump-start your company’s cultural initiative.

Learn the lingo. If you’re a student of culture and business writing in general, you’re familiar with the usual clinical terms: core values, mission and vision, and employee evaluations. Executives use them over and over, and the terms

6 *Start with Why*, YouTube video, 18:01, posted by TEDx Talks, September 28, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=u4Zo-JKF_VuA.

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tend to drown out the message behind them. I'm a big fan of memorable catch phrases, so I incorporate some concepts in my own shorthand expressions. Below is a list of the terms you will see used in the following chapters.

Culture Czars Glossary

CoreVals: a company's core values.

CorePurpose: the overarching company goal and reason for being.

CoreWorkflow: the overarching company workflow or master process.

CoreChart: an infographic that combines a company's CoreVals, CorePurpose, and CoreWorkflow.

CoreScore: a numeric measurement that indicates the degree to which employees and teams work in concert with CoreVals.










Core People Processes: the hiring, unhiring, and evaluating protocols based on CoreVals.

Culture Czar: a leader who exemplifies a company's CoreVals and a champion of the corporate culture.

Get the big picture. Each chapter includes a brief discussion of why and how to take another step toward a more intentional culture. You've probably already done your homework, so you'll see less data and statistics and more practical

advice. The 9 Deeds will help you break down the big picture into manageable snapshots.

9 Deeds

- | | |
|--|---|
|  Discover |  Dictate |
|  Discern |  Devise |
|  Describe |  Deliver |
|  Design |  Determine |
|  Decree | |

Drill down to the details. Each chapter ends with a workbook exercise. Give thought to each of these sections on your own, with much introspection and the kind of attention you'd give your most pressing issues, and then complete the exercise with your team. Each exercise will build on the one before it and by the end of the exercises, you will have a cultural plan ready to implement with your team.

Take it one week at a time. Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither was Roman culture. Invest the time and effort, and it will pay off. The Culture Czars process is a specific system that is easy to learn and implement. One nice thing about working with values and culture is that you can fit these tasks into your weeks at your convenience, although you have to really consider culture-building as part of your job description and schedule the work. You can comfortably accomplish each Deed around your other company demands. Even if you have to miss one week, you can still complete the entire program within 90 Days. In just one calendar quarter, you'll be closer to having a truly valued culture. Warning: This is addictive and fun! The more time you devote to the effort, the more you will want to do. Then you'll know you're a Culture Czar.



PART ONE:

ALIVE

Bring Your Core Values to Life

- ✓ Discover
- ✓ Discern
- ✓ Describe

CHAPTER 1

Discover

*Her mantle large, of greenish hue,
My gazing wonder chiefly drew;
Deep lights and shades, bold-mingling, threw
A lustre grand;
And seemed, to my astonished view,
A well-known land.*

—ROBERT BURNS, THE VISION



YOU ARE A CEO, a company founder, a department head, or some other brand of business leader. You set the tone for your employees. This is a buck you cannot pass. Many times, when I see a broken company culture, it's because the person at the top is not living by example. Hypocrisy doesn't forward your agenda. Remember that values are connected to emotions. If you don't emotionally engage your team, they will have no reason to feel or act on those values.

The thought of emotionally engaging with a group leaves some leaders in a panic. However, connection can be quite simple. All great company cultures start at the top with excellent leadership. Simply put, you can't have one without the other. Before we can get into the Culture Czars program, we must first make sure the team leader lives the values the company hopes to imbue. From my consulting work with

many corporate leaders, I have found that the most successful leaders are the ones who share the following five traits:

1. They have a “culture-first” mentality: If you’re someone else’s boss, it’s hard not to get caught up in the day-to-day internal and operational problems. Nevertheless, great Culture Czars create space to focus on culture, invest time to create core values (which we refer to as CoreVals), and spend energy to bring them alive and make them thrive. They realize that focusing on culture ultimately eliminates the ineffective patterns that can easily bog them down. They understand that creating a valued culture sets a more positive course. In short, their mission is much grander—they see themselves as leading a culture, not just a company.

2. They’re closely involved with the people operations: Successful Culture Czars take ownership of the people side of business. The number one thing that influences your culture is the people—Culture Czars don’t hand-off critical people operations to someone else. They are constantly involved in assessing and managing, making sure the people working within the organization are the right fit. Cultural fit is a key part of hiring decisions, and when an employee is a drain on the culture, they take steps to quickly unhire him/her.

Linda Maclachlan, CEO of Entara, an IT managed service firm, takes this seriously. Empathy is one of Entara’s CoreVals and she begins laying the framework the minute employees come on board. In an interview with her for the Culture Czar podcast series, she laughed and said, “I’m probably the only leader on the planet who has their technical engineers watch a Brené Brown [expert on vulnerability in leadership] video about the meaning of empathy. That is

how we start our new employee training.” What MacLachlan understands is that core values are not an afterthought; they are an integral, foundational piece to introduce as soon as possible.

3. They champion the CoreVals internally and externally:

Great Culture Czars take every opportunity to discuss their CoreVals and share stories about the company culture on every public stage—at company-wide meetings, at speeches outside the organization, even during engagements with partners. As we will discuss fully in later chapters, they tell stories to ensure they become a part of company folklore. They’re proud of the culture they have worked hard to cultivate, and they help make it thrive by sharing current examples of how the culture positively shapes their workplace.

4. They really *see* their employees: As I mentioned in the Introduction, I spent my childhood in Southern Africa and there is a Zulu greeting there, *sawubona*, meaning “I see you.” As a full acknowledgment of a person’s presence, it’s a wholehearted recognition of the total person in front of you and what he or she brings to the world. That’s different than the typical “hi” we mutter when greeting our colleagues in the office. *Sawubona* suggests a moment of actual connection—something that our usual greetings tend to lack. Even beyond a simple acknowledgement, we rarely *see* each other in the workplace. Leaders especially, should take the time to fully recognize the people they work with each day. It’s a small thing that can make a big difference in elevating company culture, and it’s a good place to start for a burgeoning Culture Czar. Even if people don’t remember what you said or did, they will surely remember how you made them feel.

Even if people don't remember what you said or did, they will surely remember how you made them feel.

As a leader, when you see an employee you haven't seen in a while, take sixty seconds to offer more than a passing "hello." Make eye contact and take the time to be fully present. I actually linger with my hand-

shake—I hold on a second longer and sometimes clasp my other hand over the back of their hand in a more sincere, two-handed grip. It sounds a bit awkward when described this way, yet you're doing this with the intention of wanting to *know* and *see* the other person.

A greeting is a moment to create a meaningful connection, if we use it that way. Apart from the individual effect, it creates a solid foundation for a great culture. Bejan Douraghy, CEO of the staffing agency Artisan Talent and fellow Culture Czar, created a company that *sees* its employees as well as its clients. When I interviewed him for the podcast series, Bejan explained that empathy—understanding and sharing what another person is feeling or experiencing—is a leading CoreVal, central to everything they do. Empathy is so critical for Bejan, who started Artisan Talent thirty years ago, that he actually refers to himself as "Chief Empathy Officer." He sees empathy as a "differentiator" of how employees behave internally, how they treat the talent they source, and how they work with their clients. "When I look back, why did I leave a company and start my own? [Because] it really wasn't a cultural fit for me," he says, adding that he intuitively knew he wanted to create a business that recognized the person. "Of course, sales targets and key performance indicators (KPIs)

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are important,” he says, “but you’re unlikely to get there if you don’t create a culture that fosters more than just numbers. If you have the right people in place, if you have the right culture in place, those numbers will follow. You really need that human element.”

Once a leader is confident with the team they have built, they must continue to cultivate those relationships. They show up and take opportunities to connect with them. They’re concerned with those one-on-one interactions and know that taking a moment to meaningfully connect with the people they work with can go a long way. It makes employees feel like they’re at the right place, working with the right people.

5. They recognize their culture champions: Leaders who value culture recognize and reward employees who act in accordance with the CoreVals. The marketing agency Pepper Group exemplifies this with their “kick-ass awards,” a peer-to-peer recognition program. Colleagues nominate each other for stand-out behavior—it could be as simple as coming in early or helping out a teammate with a project.

Pepper Group Kick-Ass Award



Pepper nominated: _____

By: _____

On: _____

For: _____

And demonstrating one or more of the following Core Values:

- ☐ Initiative has no Boundaries
- ☐ Work & Play with Passion
- ☐ Pride in Craft & Service
- ☐ Be Smarter Tomorrow
- ☐ Scraped Knees Teach Us to Dance
- ☐ Face to Face with Grace
- ☐ Strength of the Wolf is in the Pack
- ☐ Choose to be Challenged

If you need more room to describe reason—write smaller.

Self-nominated Nominees will get their Ass-Kicked.

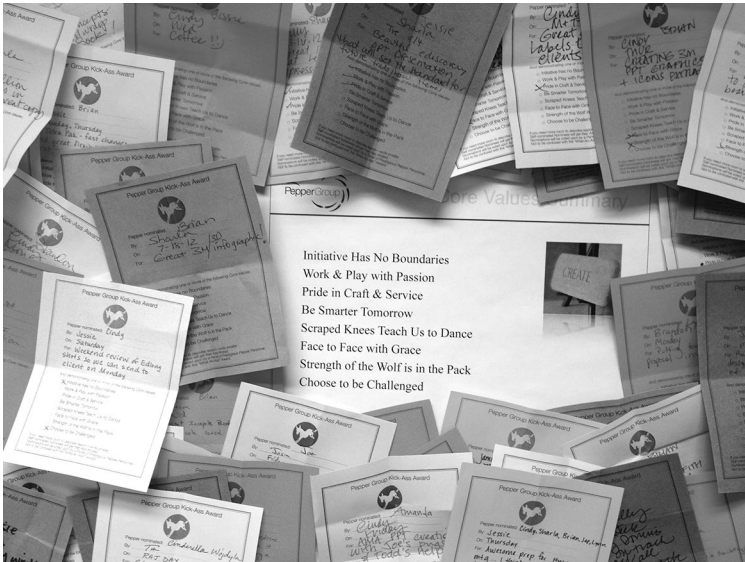
Nominations will be voted upon by a Panel of Prestigious Pepper Personnel.

Not to be confused with the "What-An-Ass" Award.

The Pepper Group's Kick-Ass Award Nomination Form

“We don’t really have definitions for what a kick-ass behavior is, because I think it’s personal,” Pepper Group Founder and CEO, Tim Padgett, explained on the Culture Czars podcast. “Whoever thinks someone kicked-ass, that’s good enough for us, and we don’t measure [employees] against each other.”

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The Pepper Group's peer-to-peer recognition program reads submissions aloud every week at the company-wide meeting.

All the submissions are read out loud every Monday morning at the company-wide meeting. Employees really like to start the week on this note. Even though they're just a team of seventeen, Tim says there are around 15-30 submissions each week. There's no financial reward for these—just an aptly named trophy. The public recognition and reinforcement are enough incentive as evidenced by the ongoing enthusiastic participation.



In recognition of an employee's hard work, the Pepper Group gives out the "Kick Ass" award each week.

As we will discuss fully in the following chapters, making these small changes in how you interact with your team sets the right foundation for the culture you will build. Just as the CEOs referenced above created cultures around their team values, you will also create your own customized work culture based on the values that pertain to your business and your mission. We'll start the program by bringing your core values to life and mapping out an action plan by answering these questions:

- 🍳 Who decides on company values? Just you? A few senior VPs? Your full management team?
- 🍳 How will you sketch out these values? Over lunch, meetings, or a retreat?
- 🍳 Who do you think your Culture Czars will be? What will you ask of them?
- 🍳 How will you be the greatest Culture Czar of all and the most aligned with the CoreVals?



When I ask my consulting clients what they've learned from building culture, they say they appreciate the contemplation and emotional honesty involved. Many entrepreneurs do not consider these ephemeral concepts part of their official duties or even their skill sets. The truth is, everybody has the capacity for deep thought and self-discovery, some just don't respect the so-called softer aspects of running a business—or they believe people won't respect them if they do.

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Dan Heuertz, CEO of The Preferred Group, spoke during a Culture Czar podcast of the role emotional intelligence should play in the workplace:

For some reason in business, we're told not to talk about our feelings. Like they're separate, put them in a box and never take them out. But what I learned...was that the more emotionally intelligent you are, the greater results you'll get as a leader and as a CEO....There's such a thin line today between personal and professional. It's so thin. I blur those lines every day. I'm not even sure if there is a line anymore. But if there is, and let's assume there is for a minute, it's so thin that if you're going to be your true self all the time, then feelings and emotions are part of who you are as a human being. I don't know how you get away from it.

Bejan Douraghy, also understands the power of leading with emotions, especially empathy. In a podcast, he explained how these softer sides of leadership are powerful tools for his team's successes:

It's a particular process that we have interviewees go through. And the characteristics that we're looking for, the cultural characteristics that we've defined, are smart, caring, nurturing, creative, and driven. Those are the key values that we are striving to find. You're not going to get it with everyone, but those are the ones that we are looking for, and you can hire for that....I think more and more companies are going to be [leading with emotions]. They have to if they want to survive with the newer generations of people that are more in touch with their feelings, more in touch with their emotions and the cultural fit.

I completely agree with Bejan and Dan and feel that more leaders are reassessing the value of emotions in the work place. When I hear leaders who traditionally shy away from such matters, I ask, “Isn’t the way your team feels when they are at work with you—in the environment you control—of consequence?” Considering they are your most important assets and the greatest drivers of your company’s success, you know the answer to that one.

The Creative Process at Work

Are you guilty of believing that you have to be typing, in meetings, or on the phone in order to get things done? Then put aside any skepticism and try thinking about the culture that you want to deliberately define and bring to life. Set aside chunks of time for the thought processes requested in this chapter. When that works out, do it for the next chapter. Even if you’re pressed for time now, once your culture is alive and well, you’ll appreciate the investment and find more minutes for thought in your workday.

For many businesses I have consulted with, there is already a theme or mantra that drives the decision-making. This can be a helpful starting point when thinking of core values. Culture Czar Bejan Douraghy shared with me the simple theme that has served him well in his tenure at Artisan Talent

[We] came up with a phrase that explains what we do and explains our culture and that phrase for us is: *inspiring better lives*.... We wanted to really bring it down to one phrase and that, of course, was not easy. But for us it’s about inspiring better lives.... How are we doing that for our clients? How are

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we doing that for the talent that we represent? And then how are we doing it internally?...It's hard to get it that simple, but you've got to get it to the point where all your employees don't need a big message....Just start with a phrase—inspire. Inspire what? *Inspire better lives.*

Dan Heuertz uses the same simplifying principle, but refers to it as his company's mantra:

We have our core values, but we also have something that is more like a constitution—we call it our mantra. We filter through it every day, every second of every day. It's taken me, by the way, six years to get this right. So, it was not easy. And I'm a person that does put time into this and loves thinking about this stuff....Our mantra is to *Do good things with good people*....So, we all take the mantra very, very seriously. If anybody just says at any time, "I just don't think they're good people," or, "We can't do good things with them," we're done. It makes it super simple in that regard. We have that high degree of trust with one another, that there's no doubt we can discuss and we can challenge it.

Though it's not always easy to distill a company's over-riding principle down to one phrase or sentence, doing so can provide a powerful indicator of a company's core value. This is why taking the time to contemplate one's mission is a valuable use of time. Kitsa Antonopoulos, a Culture Czar client and the founder of Lumiere Children's Therapy, adds this encouragement based on her culture-building experience: "Businesspeople need to give themselves permission to do mental tasks, because we don't think that's work. Carve

out the time you need on your calendar. Think things over at your desk or go on a walk—just be sure to carve out the time.”

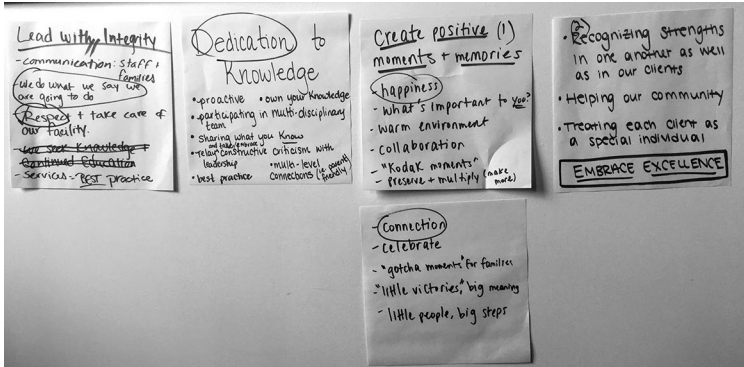
Kitsa knows the value of applied thought. When she tapped me to strengthen Lumiere’s culture, she had been thinking about the issues for years. She had not been procrastinating or unwilling to get into core values, but for some time, she felt the exercise was premature—that the company didn’t yet have enough history to distill the substance of its purpose. She was right; there needs to be some *doing* before defining of values to ensure there is a legacy from which to build and develop a culture. Although you could draft core values early in the inception of a business, it’s always good to keep them fluid in the early stages.

Having recently been through a rebranding, Kitsa was excited to take her new image a step further to reflect her core values—whatever those were. She also knew she wanted to implement a business operating system and a more culture-centric hiring procedure, two things that are also part of the Culture Czars program. (You’ll see how to use those tools in concert with your CoreVals in Part Three.) We started out by brainstorming what already existed in her maturing company. We went looking for their core values.

Sometimes we are so close to daily operations that we don’t notice the little things that define our culture. As the poet Robert Burns put it: “O, would some power the gift to give us, / to see ourselves as others see us.” That’s where I come in. I was able to observe Kitsa and her staff, and it was much easier for me—an objective outsider and Culture Czar—to see how they stood out from other organizations and what values were uniquely theirs. Kitsa had already done

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some groundwork by sitting with her leadership team and brainstorming on the topic. This gave us a starting point from which to build.

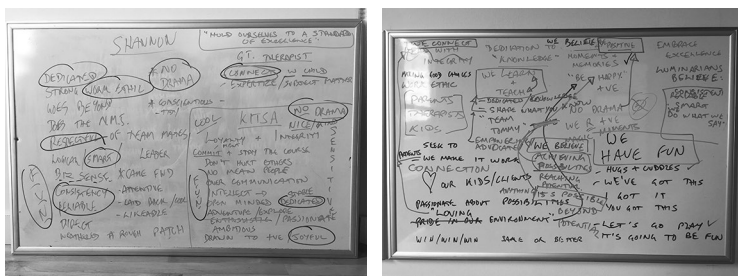


Early notes from Lumiere Children's Therapy initial brainstorming session.

My job was to guide their discovery toward the goal. I helped Kitsa by sitting quietly in her office, observing what went on around me and taking copious notes. The work and clinical spaces at Lumiere are intentionally bright and homey. Because it is a children's therapy practice, the setting is meant to feel welcoming and safe. The therapy starts when you walk in the door. I watched kids run around the living room that serves as a waiting area and pull toys out of the chest and onto the rug. I listened to what the kids and parents were saying, what the staff was saying, and what the whole vibe was saying. In particular, I paid attention to the values displayed by her best employees—the company rock stars, the ones who achieved the most and inspired others. I also observed Kitsa interacting with her team, and I listened to the words she used and the way she used them. I noticed how she would say “you’ve got this,” and “believe it’s possible” to scared parents

who had just received the diagnosis that their child was autistic. How marvelous when I heard the staff repeating Kitsa's phrases to a child in therapy, "You've got this!"

These sentiments are part of the DNA at Lumiere Children's Therapy. Months or years later, when a child graduates with social skills that parents never thought possible, they become part of Lumiere's community of success stories. They are part of the culture. Those parents now *believe it's possible* for their child to live a fulfilling life. They feel like *they have got this*—the strength and tools to overcome their child's challenges. I call these tag lines descriptive behaviors or subtexts that explain the CoreVals. By observing and listening, I helped Kitsa move beyond rudimentary expressions of her personal values to capture what applied to her company's values.

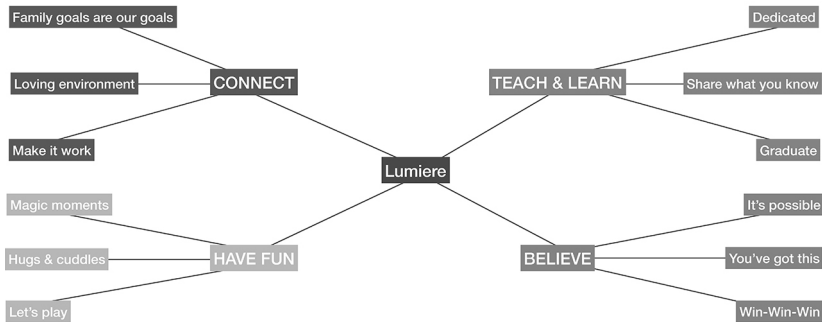


As seen here in Lumiere's early brainstorming sessions, this phase of establishing CoreVals can be messy and chaotic. It's all part of the creative process to get from personal values to a company's values.

We reconvened the leadership team to search more deeply for verbal resonance and to tap into what felt right. We went over my notes looking for repetitive words and themes. Next, on a white board, we put themes into categories. We had one for family goals, one for educational hopes and dreams, and we kept going until four clear values coalesced. We got them by asking hard questions and making lots of observations—about what makes Kitsa tick, why she formed the practice,

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where she thought Lumiere was going, and how her team operated. This gave us the real purpose of the company—and the values her people would have to act upon to fulfill it. Lumiere’s CoreVals were: *Believe*, *Connect*, *Teach & Learn*, and *Have Fun*.



After several brainstorming sessions, Lumiere’s CoreVals start to take shape into four distinct areas: *Believe*, *Connect*, *Teach & Learn*, and *Have Fun*.

Beautiful stuff, but what does it mean? Even those stellar bits of clarity are not enough to hinge a culture on. I’ll show you how to open up the sentiments behind your CoreVals—and the happy result of Kitsa’s and Lumiere’s soul searching—in Chapter 3. After years of thought, a rebrand in the right direction, and immersion in discovery, Kitsa was well on her way to becoming a Culture Czar. This type of success is not always guaranteed. Focus and sincerity are critical. For now, let’s step back and take a look at what happens when you don’t do it right.

When Your Culture Train Goes Off Track

Is having no stated values worse than having insufficient ones? Yes. As I mentioned, I learned this painful lesson at my

first job out of business school. At that company, there was no set direction of any kind, not even concrete goals. We employees didn't know what we were supposed to be doing as an organization, where we were headed, or how we should function together. This lack of standard made it easy for the owner to arbitrarily criticize and blindside us. Those who risked the least and did nothing to attract notice survived in such an environment that lacked all sense of teamwork or cooperation. I vowed that any company I led would not suffer that same fate.

You may think you're dedicated, but if you are not living, breathing, and talking about those values—keeping them alive—then the culture doesn't thrive and your organization's performance doesn't drive to its full potential.

We've already noted the worst mistake in cultivating a sincere culture is when the CEO and other management leaders are not committed to the CoreVals they have prescribed for everyone else. You may think you're dedicated, but if you are not living, breathing, and talking about

those values—keeping them alive—then the culture doesn't thrive and your organization's performance doesn't drive to its full potential. As Mike Petsalis, fellow Culture Czar and CEO of Vircom, shared with me, "There's no on/off switch for culture, it's always on, which means everything you say, everything you do, has to be according to your values and culture. Doing that actually makes it easier to make tough decisions. You just go back to your culture and values."

During your private brainstorming sessions, make a pact with yourself: commit to everyday culture reminders for a healthy period of time. See if you can get to the point where

The Culture Fix

your seventeen-year-old daughter—or your best friend, a supplier, a customer—can repeat the values that you model. If they can do it, then your employees probably can too, and that’s a milestone to aim for. Part of putting your intentions into words is making those terms memorable. You may have a string of heartfelt words that push your business forward, however, if no one can recall them, then you are back to an overlooked poster on a wall. And there they stay.

For instance, here is a list of Wells Fargo Bank’s stated values:

1. *People as a competitive advantage*
2. *Ethics*
3. *What’s right for customers*
4. *Diversity and inclusion*
5. *Leadership*

Easy enough to memorize, but what do they mean? Well, here’s the official explanation of the third value:

We value what’s right for our customers in everything we do. We’re proud to compete in an industry that’s central to the growth of our local, national, and global economies—an industry where doing what’s right for customers and communities enables us to make a reasonable profit at the same time. Our customers are our friends. We treat them as our guests. We want them to be successful. We want them to feel as if they’re part of Wells Fargo—that we’re their company. We want to be approachable and caring, exceed their expectations, and invest in relationships that last a lifetime.⁷

7 John G. Stumpf. “The Vision & Values of Wells Fargo.” Accessed January 28, 2019. <http://www.damicofcg.com/files/74720/Vision%20%26%20Values.pdf>.

The Wells Fargo team goes on to explain each value with lengthy paragraphs of more great language, a worthy and needed task that we will get into in the next chapter. However, can the average person remember it? As Dr. Horn's Stanford research asserted, stated values that are not internalized cannot be acted upon. You must live them reflexively in order to genuinely radiate them. That's what you want your people to do: radiate the company's driving forces. That's what forms an identity. That's what customers respond to.

These values are the new and improved version following the bank's fall from grace. Faulty CoreVals may be behind what happened to Wells Fargo: customer exploitation, scandal, and the biggest fine in history. Wells Fargo had glowing CoreVals but blatantly ignored them. They were there in lip service only. *What's right for customers* was a stated value yet they consistently took advantage of millions of customers.

As you get cozy with your CoreVals, walk around and take a look at how your employees do their jobs. What is it that *already* motivates them? These are the nuggets you're searching for. It's great to have ideals and aspirations, but these are not at the core of your organization. As you put your values into words, keep in mind the here and now. Consider the words you have chosen and look objectively at your team and work environment. Then ask yourself, *Do the words feel real? Do they feel too lofty, or do they adequately portray me and my company/organization?*

Perhaps the saddest mistake you can make is to churn out four or five values and call it a day. I have often been called to consult with organizations that settled on a handful of CoreVals, scribbled them on a piece of paper, and stuck them in a desk. They may have told some folks and even emailed them to the rest of the company, but that didn't mean they read

them—understood them, memorized them, much less acted on them. This is an incomplete exercise that does nobody any good. It's also part of the reason that the Culture Czar program and the name of the podcast series is *From Core Values to Valued Culture*. It's not enough to simply *have* them, it's what you *do* with them.

Learn from these mistakes so you don't make your own. As you start the first workbook exercise, do it with the intention of following through, knowing that each exercise builds on the previous one. Don't just rattle off the first terms that come to mind. Allow yourself to dive deeply into your own psyche, your company history, and the real “why” of what you do. Allow yourself to reflect and to discover what is already there.

Thoughts from a Culture Czar

“*Having been through four business ventures, I don't think I will ever again start a business without spending a healthy amount of time starting to understand what the business stands for as a brand and backing that down into the core values, because I spent so much time cleaning up mistakes. Suddenly you have a manager who's been with you for four years and now you go through and set the core values and look at them in a meeting thinking 'How the hell is this person here?' It's easy when you can compare them against core values. But in my experience if you don't do it as soon as you can, the cleanup is harder than the implementation.*”

—BRIAN WASPI, CEO CLEAR WATER OUTDOOR

EXERCISE 1: DISCOVER

Before beginning your first brainstorming session, take *The Culture Fix* Checkup found at www.cultureczars.com/the-culture-fix-book.



Your results will serve as a baseline to track while you're navigating the Culture Czar process. You will revisit this survey at the end of your 9 Deeds.

The Culture Fix Checkup Results:

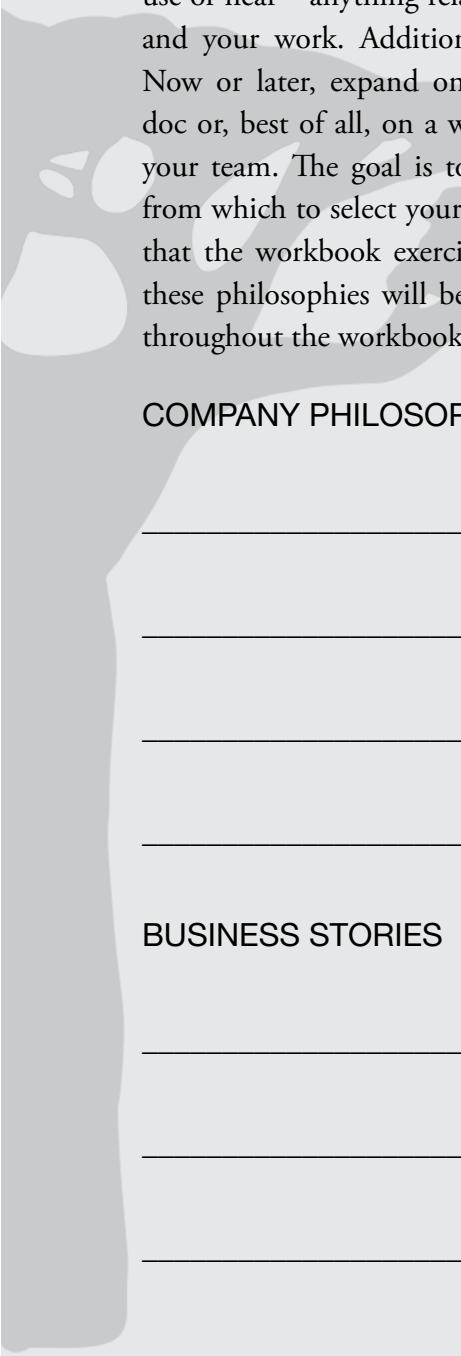
Before Score: _____

Comments/Recommendations/Thoughts:

If you prefer to write in a separate workbook that has more room to scribe, visit www.cultureczars.com for a free download of the companion workbook

It's time to explore. Set out to brainstorm, not to set values in stone. Don't hurry. Let your ideas bubble up. Keep in mind that three or four (up to six) CoreVals are a good quantity to learn and embrace fully, while providing enough substance upon which to hang your company's shingle.

In the spaces below, begin to list your organization's philosophies and the stories that make up your history. Jot down unique lingo, inside jokes, phrases that you commonly



use or hear—anything related to the substance of your team and your work. Additionally, name your best employees. Now or later, expand on these lists on paper, in a Word doc or, best of all, on a whiteboard with some members of your team. The goal is to create an abundant background from which to select your cultural definition. Keep in mind that the workbook exercises build on each other and that these philosophies will be returned to and expanded upon throughout the workbook.

COMPANY PHILOSOPHIES

BUSINESS STORIES

UNIQUE LINGO, JOKES, PHRASES

BEST EMPLOYEES

CHAPTER 2

Discern

*By stately tower, or palace fair,
Or ruins pendent in the air,
Bold stems of heroes, here and there,
I could discern;
Some seemed to muse, some seemed to dare
With feature stern.*

—ROBERT BURNS, THE VISION



CONGRATULATIONS! YOU'VE NOW GOT the raw material you need to get to the heart of your company's motives, purpose, and directional compass. Consider this chapter and its workbook exercise as integral parts of a treasure hunt. You'll be turn-

ing over rocks, looking for glimmers of gold and precious stones. This week, you'll continue your private introspection, extrapolating from your answers to Workbook Exercise 1 that put your values, and those of your top staff, into words. You can think about where they intersect or diverge. You can decide whether to compromise, to pull others toward your way of thinking, or to lean toward theirs. You'll find this part of the process enlightening and empowering. It will show you what you have in common with your managers and employees. It will point out the sort of characteristics that forward your agenda. Most importantly, it will hint at what you *don't*

want—what you don't stand for, what does not move the company further along in its purpose and toward its goals.

In Week 2, it's time to identify your innate Culture Czars. As you bring up your new mission over lunch or in communications, pay close attention to the responses. When you see the light come into someone's eyes or you receive effusive, enthusiastic emails supporting your quest, you'll know you've found another czar. You'll take your strongest czars as your confidantes as you deliberately discern your CoreVal priorities and the language that best expresses them. Your Culture Czars will often self-identify by volunteering or showing the most exuberance during the discovery process. It's best to embrace their contributions so that all levels of the company are represented and not simply the leadership. At egalitarian companies like Ink Factory, the owners of the company turned over the task of leading the descriptive behaviors to their Culture Czars completely.

The worst mistake you can make here is not to go deep enough in your self-inquiry, disallowing yourself to share your honest intentions with your team. Authentic culture begins with personal clarity at the top. You don't expect someone else to tell you what is most important to you. The first insights must come from you, the business leader. Core values are certainly your values as well as those of your team and those naturally developed over time within the organization. They're not "out there somewhere;" they're inside you and your organization. You need only discover and reveal them. Every great boss learns: CoreVals must be a part of you, and you must own them more than anybody.

Every great boss learns: CoreVals must be a part of you, and you must own them more than anybody.

Core Values—So Much More Than Just Words

In his book, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, author Daniel Pink captured succinctly what people need in order to feel fulfilled and happy in their work: “Human beings have an innate inner drive to be autonomous, self-determined, and connected to one another. And when that drive is liberated, people achieve more and live richer lives.”⁸ To this list of employee needs, Daniel Coyle, author of *The Culture Code*, adds safety: “Safety is not mere emotional weather but rather the foundation on which strong culture is built.”⁹ CoreVals that address and enable these emotional satisfiers help to create healthy environments. Just as laws can protect us, a written code of conduct increases our sense of empowerment, belonging, and safety within the group.

When I started consulting with David Nance, CEO of SABRE Security Equipment Corporation, he had a complicated situation that only cultural improvement could solve. SABRE is the global leader in the manufacture of pepper spray and other safety products for personal and law-enforcement use. The company, founded by Larry Nance in 1975, has been in business for more than forty years, and the family’s second generation has been at the helm for some time. Although the enterprise had a long and successful history when I was brought in, it also had some baggage, as all companies do. Morale in the factory and warehouse was low. No matter how solid SABRE’s market standing was, sooner or later the drag on productivity was going to take its toll.

8 Daniel Pink, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 71.

9 Daniel Coyle, *The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups* (New York: Random House, 2018), 6.

The emotional needs were not readily met at SABRE, yet there was no reason they couldn't be. The company's size made delegating tasks and decisions to key individuals possible. Those people could then take the initiative to provide other employees with the opportunity to develop some autonomy in their own work. While many lower-level jobs were repetitive or limiting, there was still room to let people work in ways that were most efficient for them, as well as to master what needed to be done to meet objectives and purpose. Pepper spray, home security products, and safety techniques keep people alive and well. Producing it was commendable and should be satisfying.

In such a setting, people *should* feel safe. The greatest signs that an individual feels safe is laughter and frivolity. There weren't enough of these signs at SABRE. The problem was not that executives and employees could not or would not be satisfied. It was that the values by which they could have been working were not solidified or clearly defined. The salient elements of their CoreVals hadn't been deliberately discerned, so they could not be consciously communicated. The CEO made a start and had written some thoughts down, but he knew he had to go further. CoreVals had been circulated but not promoted within the company, nor had they been shared with the broader SABRE community of distributors, customers, and end users. This corporation's situation is quite common and demonstrates how vital it is to bring culture alive and make it thrive so you can drive your people and business toward their full potential.

There were mitigating factors for SABRE, too. The organization was split between two locales, with sales and administrative headquarters in Chicago and the factory and

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warehouse in St. Louis. The top executive posts were held by family members, who brought some history with them. These conditions influenced the unity of the staff, the flow of communications, and the ability to work as a concerted team.

To make sure I had the full perspective when I began consulting with them, I received input from a large number of the staff through a survey. Next, I interviewed employees looking for common themes, stories, and traits that might illuminate the company's innate CoreVals. This process also allowed me to distinguish who among SABRE was already a Culture Czar and could help the team toward a valued culture.

While we did address the specifics, we went back to the drawing board to do it. In David's case, the rich legacy of stories associated with SABRE's founder and its customers pointed the way to the enduring core values *that were already there*. They simply needed to be discovered, discerned, and developed. In SABRE's case, they emerged from the company's forty storied years of growth under family leadership. It was time to tell those stories.

What Makes Your Company Unique?

In my consultation, I asked SABRE leadership for testimonials and the specifics behind them. Within these, I found three compelling themes:

Humble Beginnings. David's father, Larry Nance, started SABRE with less than three hundred dollars that he won in a national sales contest. His home became his home office; his wife, Jane, became his business partner. They began selling a tear gas formulation, and ten years later, moved into pepper

spray research and product development. Larry first sold his merchandise to sporting goods stores, driving as far as his gas money would take him. His vision propelled the start-up to global success, with a formula that ranks as the number-one pepper spray used for protection by police and consumers in more than forty countries. This company has mastered its product.

Heroes. The people who use SABRE products and training programs have their own tales to tell. One customer in a park was able to repel an attacker and escape harm. A college student used her SABRE pepper spray to prevent a rape. A police officer avoided the need for lethal force by deploying his spray canister and apprehending the disabled perpetrator. Not only do customers appreciate the quality and convenience of these potent deterrents, but employees of the company can take pride in making something that literally saves lives.

Partners. SABRE products are especially valuable to scores of law enforcement officers and some of society's most vulnerable members. The company pairs with organizations that protect women at risk for sexual assault, both domestically and in developing countries. Survivors of assault find peace of mind in being armed with protective spray and trained in self-defense. The company donates funds and resources to support these groups that most need their products.

From these themes, David's team and I unearthed the main core values that keep the company running and relevant.

SABRE's Main Core Values:

Proud & Passionate







Empowered

Prepared & Engaged

Go the Extra Mile

These were concrete emotions and conditions to which staff members could relate—once they understood clearly what they stood for. I'll show you how to get to that greater level of precision in Chapter 3, and you'll learn about the positive outcome of SABRE's cultural revolution later in the book. For now, however, let's take one more look at these CoreVals and how they relate to the work experience.

1. *Proud and passionate.* If you're part of the factory or warehouse staff, you need a reason to get out of bed in the morning beyond your hourly pay. SABRE's stories and their business model clearly exemplified what people could be proud of:

-  The founder's dedication, vision, and persistence
-  The family-owned company
-  The long company history and loyalty to its community
-  Products made in America and tested onsite
-  Being the global market leader
-  Protection of people's health and safety

Pride in these factors, plus the company's special support of women's health and safety, made those who worked there passionate about what they did—at that point, they

just didn't know it yet. In my opinion, three words—*proud and passionate*—are not enough to reveal their scope. This is why we need the subtexts, or descriptive behaviors, to explain what SABRE's people mean by those words. The context lends specificity to the value. You'll read the full descriptions later, but the two that we came up with for this value were:

- 🌐 We are proud of our mission to save and our global leading brands.
- 🌐 We are passionate about our heroes, our team, and our customers.

With these explainers, SABRE's products moved from lowly aerosol cans propelling pepper spray to life-savers that turned customers into "heroes." Now *that's* changing a perspective and the way people feel about their work.

2. Empowered. This value could be shared by employees, customers, and senior management alike, as I found out. Clearly, being armed with an effective repellant against attackers, home invaders, and even aggressive animals is empowering, no matter who you are. Men, women, children, police officers, prison guards, and consumers of all stripes gain power from the pepper.

I wanted to give everyone a reason to carry forth SABRE's values. Internally, empowerment meant more freedom to perform tasks as workers saw fit. This entailed building trust across management and staff. Executives and managers felt empowered to delegate, trusting that their goals would be pursued in line with the company's best interests. Among the sibling administrative team, building culture from common values

created another kind of empowerment—it leveled the playing field so that everybody’s ideas and concerns were received with open minds, rather than by job title or birth order.

3. *Prepared and engaged.* This value relates to both work ethic and the result of that work. Being ready to hop on an eagerly awaited order serves customers who may be in dire need. Doing the job right at the factory, test site, and warehouse gives consumers the tools they need to be prepared and engaged—to support a 360-degree awareness of their environments while increasing personal security. This CoreVal tells workers what they need to do, which is be ready and willing to do what it takes in their roles. It also gives a nod to their larger purpose in the company—to prepare and engage others in their own safety.

4. *Go the extra mile.* This CoreVal also relates to what the company expects of workers and what it gives to its customers. When sales and production need to be high, staff must jump in the boat and row together. In a medium-sized, family-owned company, staying ahead of the competition by pleasing customers is crucial. Satisfying those customers so they can go beyond their comfort zones in an emergency—perhaps going the extra mile to protect a loved one or stranger—is the result of their efforts.



What corporations consistently operate in line with their stated values? Or, to put it better, which companies do consumers perceive as doing so? Let’s go with a leader, Apple








Inc. Apple's founder, Steve Jobs, knew the value of having CoreVals and sharing them with the public. He once said, "It's a complicated and noisy world, and we're not going to get a chance to get people to remember much about us. No company is. We have to be really clear about what we want them to know about us."¹⁰ In another interview, he explained how Apple's core values remained their North Star as they weathered conflicts that came with a growing company:

[T]he worst thing that could possibly happen as we get big and we get a little more influence in the world, is if we change our core values and start letting it slide. I can't do that. I'd rather quit.... We're certainly a little more experienced, we're certainly more beat up, but the core values are the same. And we come into work wanting to do the same thing today as we did five or ten years ago which is build the best products for people.... That's what keeps me going. And it's what kept me going five years ago. It's what kept me going ten years ago when the doors were almost closed, and it's what'll keep me going five years from now, whatever happens.¹¹

As Jobs explained, core values are constant. The market might change, the culture might change, but the core values remain the same. They create order out of chaos. The company's current CEO, Tim Cook, reiterated the following core values statement:

10 *Steve Jobs Marketing Strategy*, YouTube video, 6:58, posted by "Inspiring Videos," February 28, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMBQwAe45jc>.

11 *Steve Jobs talks About Core Values at D8 2010*, YouTube video, 2:28, posted by "SteveNote," January 5, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5m-KxekNhMqY&feature=youtu.be>.

-  We believe that we're on the face of the Earth to make great products.
-  We believe in the simple, not the complex.
-  We believe that we need to own and control the primary technologies behind the products we make.
-  We participate only in markets where we can make a significant contribution.
-  We believe in saying no to thousands of projects so that we can really focus on the few that are truly important and meaningful to us.
-  We believe in deep collaboration and cross-pollination of our groups, which allow us to innovate in a way that others cannot.
-  We don't settle for anything less than excellence in every group in the company, and we have the self-honesty to admit when we're wrong and the courage to change.¹²

I had the privilege of working closely with Apple at Lex-tech, my mobile app development business, and I witnessed firsthand how they always acted in concert with their stated values. They were consistently clear about what they would do and more importantly what they would not do. Let's look at two of those "values" more closely. These sentiments are striking in their capacity *to be supported* by the company's representatives. "We believe in saying no to thousands of

12 Adam Lashinsky, "The Cook Doctrine at Apple," *Fortune*, January 22, 2009, <http://fortune.com/2009/01/22/the-cook-doctrine-at-apple/>.

projects so that we can really focus on the few that are truly important and meaningful to us.” Admitting that a focus on priorities entails weeding out certain prospects is sincere and easily lived up to.

The final “value” on the list is not an easily attainable goal, but the description acknowledges that and points to what will happen if at first the company fails in that pursuit—it will try again, and try something different until it does succeed.

In establishing your company’s or organization’s core values, ask yourself how well you follow them on a daily basis. Be honest. No one expects you to “do the right thing” all of the time. What about when the unexpected happens, when meetings get cancelled and culture takes a back seat? It’s easy for leaders to lose sight of things when we find ourselves in the weeds. That happens in any business.

If you know you are particularly susceptible, take steps to avoid or alleviate becoming overwhelmed. Delegate. Be more strict in scheduling your time. Resolve not to let anything interfere with meeting your goals, which now include keeping CoreVals and culture among your priorities. If you do find yourself in the weeds, don’t be afraid to admit it and accept your own shortcomings. I, myself, have admitted right in my company blog, “A busy spell at work has caused me to pause in writing this blog, and it feels like I might not have given our culture the priority it deserves. This is a danger we can all succumb to, and I of all people, need to keep [core values] front and center in order to maintain them.” If you are an effective CEO, founder, owner, or other type of company leader, you already know how to capitalize on your strengths. The question now is, how will you work on your weaknesses?

The Culture Fix



CoreVals show how a company can extend beyond the employees to a company's customers, and how leaders can lead a culture that extends well beyond the four walls of an organization. As Dee Robinson, founder and president of Robinson Hill, shared with me during an interview for the Culture Czar podcast, creating a work culture has the capability to change the lives of the people who engage with it:

I love the fact that people will walk out of work thinking, *I have better opportunities to change the trajectory of my life at home with family.* These are values that I know can carry them in this job or any other job and help lead to continued success. That's what I want for all our people. I want them to lead successful lives, both personally and professionally. What we do in our lives, hopefully, we'll do in our jobs.

In addition to changing the world within a business, asking people to be more engaged with their values can change the way they conduct themselves in all areas of life. The ripple effect of creating an intentional company culture has the potential to change the lives of individuals, their families, their communities, and their worlds.

At Lumiere Children's Therapy, their CoreVals poster displays their four core values. It also illuminates how team members can use their thoughts and behaviors to further illuminate each value. In this way, core values are not merely words on a poster; they're thoughts and actions that have the capacity to change the lives of all they touch.



Lumiere Children's Therapy CoreVals Poster



To review in more detail, visit www.cultureczars.com

You can see how just a few well-turned words and phrases can speak volumes more than their dictionary definitions. Now that you know how and why to refine your stories, themes, and company lingo, you can get one step closer to putting those core values on the wall and into people's hearts and minds. Complete the next workbook exercise, and you'll be ready to do that.

Thoughts from a Culture Czar

“ Culture [is] simple, but it's incredibly complicated to pull off....I think it's a ship without the rudder without the core values....The way I simplify it in my head is 'vibe.' What is the vibe? I mean, you can feel it when it's right. And I believe you can feel it when it's wrong. So if you have the right culture, or the wrong culture even, you can feel it through the vibe. ”

– DAN HEUERTZ, THE PREFERRED GROUP

EXERCISE 2: DISCERN

Look back on what you wrote in Exercise 1 and use it to complete Task A, below. Then, invite your best Culture Czars to help you delve more deeply to produce a shortlist of terminology for your CoreVals in Task B. A heads-up: you may need to return to Week 2 from time to time to get your thoughts and your words just right and to align your CoreVals with your current status in the workplace, marketplace, and world. Throughout the process, continue to ask yourself if your words feel real. This could be the most important task in your organization's life.

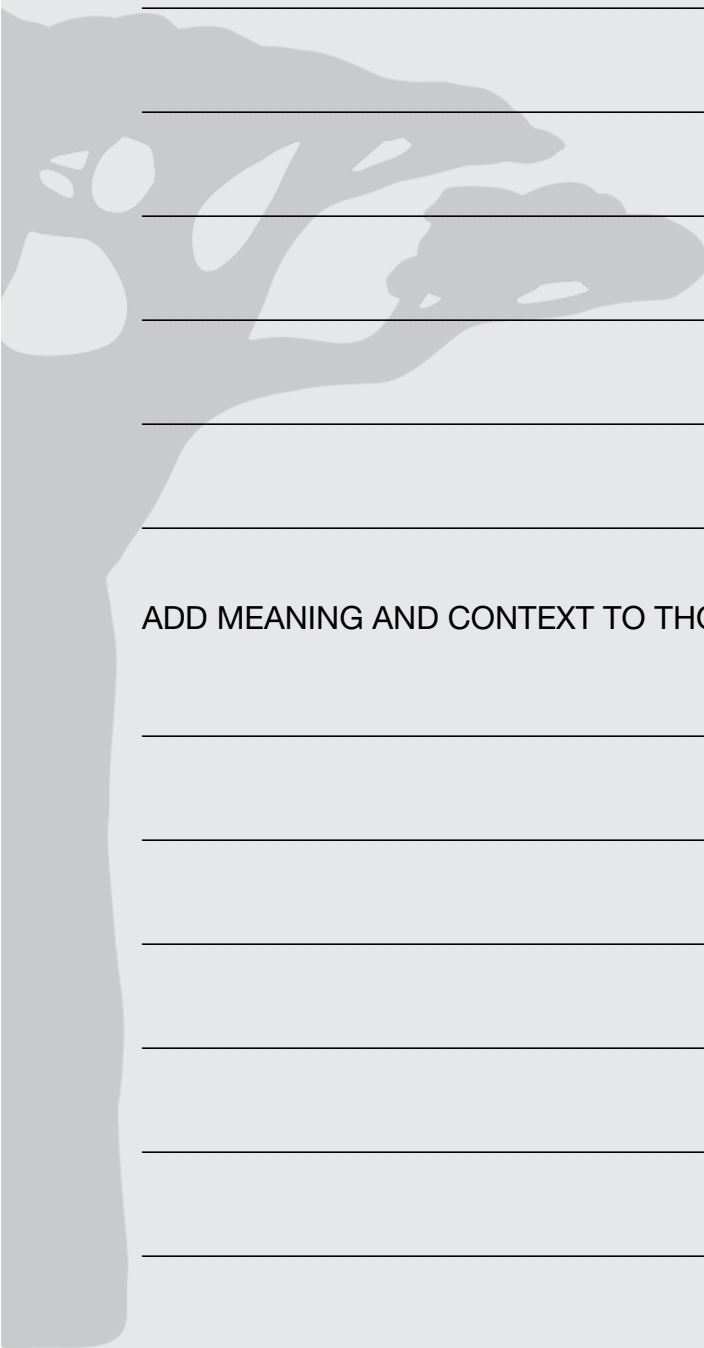
A. Review the language associated with your company and its stories in Exercise 1. Imagine and project which values you think your best employees exhibit. Then write down your own personal values and the values that best represent how your company fulfills its purpose.

BEST EMPLOYEE VALUES

OWNER/FOUNDER/CEO's VALUES

B. Get your team together and consider what you have chosen as CoreVal priorities. Circle the top five to eight words or phrases from Task A above. Collaborate with the team and add some descriptions of what they think the values mean in the context of your organization.

TOP FIVE TO EIGHT WORDS/PHRASES



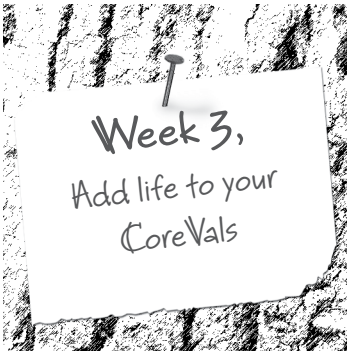
ADD MEANING AND CONTEXT TO THOSE TERMS

CHAPTER 3

Describe

*Through many a wild, romantic grove,
Near many a hermit-fancied cove
(Fitting haunts for friendship or for love
In musing mood),
An aged Judge, I saw him rove,
Dispensing good.*

—ROBERT BURNS, THE VISION



PART ONE OF THIS cultural journey is all about putting thoughts, feelings, and beliefs into words. That is not an easy task! Perhaps that's because we don't practice doing it enough. We seldom express ourselves effectively in conversation. We rely on context, tone of voice, and assumptions about the receiver's ability to understand our intended meaning before we say it. In his book, *Find Your Why*, Simon Sinek uses the example of being in love to demonstrate how difficult it is to put nebulous concepts into words: "There's just one problem with feelings. They can be tremendously difficult to express in words. That's the reason we so often resort to metaphors and analogies."¹³ In trying to describe the object of our devotion, for example, we dance around the topic, lighting

13 Simon Sinek, *Find Your Why: A Practical Guide to Discovering Purpose for You or Your Team* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), 16.

on characteristics that we love about a person, like being funny or smart. Or we use euphemisms that get close, “She completes me.” Being unable to express *why* we love someone is not a conscious failure. As Sinek notes, our brains are segmented. The portion that registers emotion does not “speak” with the portion that forms language.

Does that stop us from trying to say what we mean? No. And in the context of building culture, it only means that we must work harder at it. Our first version of CoreVals at Lextech totaled 389 words. The words were there, but we needed something short and sweet that people could remember, yet it had to be rich with meaning. That’s when the true sentiments come into stark relief. When you chip away at the stone, you find the masterpiece inside. In our case, we unearthed five very apt core values. In order to make them more fun and more compelling, we worked with our in-house designers to give them superhero personas that would appeal to a group of mostly technical folks who adored science fiction and comic books. Like *The Avengers* or *Fantastic Four*, our superheroes soon became known to our group as *The Core*. We wanted them to be accessible and crystal-clear to everyone else, too. That’s where further description came in.

How to Say What Your Core Values Mean

When we got to the Describe phase of Lextech’s CoreVals development, we were still feeling our way. Having summarized and superhero-ized our core values, we wanted to add some descriptions that would let us know when we were living them. We asked ourselves, *How would someone new to the team know what we meant when we challenged each other to “grow” or “deliver success?”*

The Culture Fix

We hit the white board and wrote down some descriptive behaviors that supported the values. From there, we winnowed it all down to just the information that an uninformed reader would need to understand our intentions. We added subheadings that described what lay at the root of our values.

Captain Client

Clients come first. We added: Client→Team→Self. We observed that right from the start, we had always cared about the client and innately wanted to do great work for them. If it was 5 p.m. on a Friday and we hadn't delivered on an end-of-week promise, none of us was going to abandon the client or the team. Identifying our action helped us decipher our descriptive behavior or attribute for this value.

We build lasting relationships. We were talking about basing our priorities on good customer relations, which we believed would serve our company best in the long-term. It left no wiggle room when making decisions that involved clients.



The early version of Captain Client was born after numerous brainstorming sessions on what descriptive behaviors supported our core value *Clients come first*.



The final version of Captain Client.

Passionista

Exude passion and energy. We were a team that was energetic and excitable about our work. We started early, competed to be the one at the white board, and were eager to share our ideas and try something new. We knew we wanted to maintain this feeling, so we captured it.

We are confident and can-do. We believed we could solve just about any problem, and we liked to say “yes.” In fact, we adopted the phrase “yes and,” and liked to correct each other if we said “yes but.”

We live the technology, and it excites us. This captured our attitude towards the possibilities and beliefs that we shared regarding mobile technology and the power of apps.



The final version of Passionista.

The Culture Fix

Danny Deliver

Deliver success takes some integrity. Did we have it?

We care and we do what we say. We did. But how did we know we could keep our promises?

We follow process so that success repeats. By doing what worked every time, we couldn't go wrong.



The final version of Danny Deliver.

Tea and Wok

Work as a team is more easily said than done. We needed to prove our commitment to teamwork with all members. How did we do that?

We respect and help others. This showed that we appreciated individuals' gifts and were ready to support each other. But how did we make the most of the team's efforts?

We listen and provide feedback. We could all be better at listening, and we all want to be



The final version of Tea & Wok.

heard. This statement reminded us to be intentional about it and notice when someone wasn't doing it. We believed in this value for the sake of team health.

Grow'n

Grow could just mean expanding the company in size and market share, yet to us it meant more.

We embrace change and invest in our future. That would help the company grow, too. But what about us?

We teach and encourage learning. We knew growth was about much more than the bottom line.



The early version of Grow'n was born after numerous brainstorming sessions on what descriptive behaviors supported our core value of *Grow*.



The final version of Grow'n.

The Culture Fix

Note the use of “we” for every Lextech statement above. This not only conveys inclusion and belonging, it suggests a more personal commitment or promise to the group. With this second, more polished round of discernment, our word count dropped from 389 to 91 and became more memorable, engaging, and much more likely to be effective. *Less is more* proved to be true, and it is worth the effort to distill the message.

Now we had core values that implied the company’s purpose and that defined what we wanted our process and our work environment to be. Most importantly, it was people-centric. When everyone moved with the flow of these values, Lextech would be a place where people would thrive and be the best that they could be. You could easily argue that there is some overlap with these values and observe that one statement might make another one redundant. In fact, this only strengthens the values as a cohesive whole. You know you have accurately described a *culture* when the values hang together and support each other to create an overall feeling. Remember that we need enough detail in the words or the imagery to leave little room for doubt about what we mean by a certain value.

You’ll know when your core values click because they will make life better for everyone in the metaphorical tree house. Getting back to that issue of prioritizing customer happiness, the CoreVal that states, *We build lasting relationships*, acts as guidance in specific situations, even when company leaders are absent. For example, suppose the team was deliberating whether to charge a client more with a pricing decision that would pull revenue into this fiscal year and boost the company’s bottom line. In the short-term, that could be great for our company, but it could hurt the client. A supervisor might argue, “Why not go for the profit? That will boost our bonus!” That action would not put the client first and would violate the

stated value. It would be easy to shoot down that idea by pointing to the core value, *We build lasting relationships*. There is no argument. Putting the client's needs first and building the long-term relationship would ultimately better serve the company. It is important to have everybody on board with that. Now we have fully actualized images that elucidate our core values and defining behaviors: *The Core*.



The Core brings Lextech's core values and descriptive behaviors to life.



To review in more detail,
visit www.cultureczars.com


How to Connect Viewers with Your Values

When a group is diverse, yet makes the same decision given the same set of circumstances, a certain power is unleashed in the organization. Instilling your core values in each member of the team can do that. Similarly, *We listen and provide feedback* carries some valuable protections for the group. Recall that feeling safe on a team is imperative. Respectful communication is part of that equation. When someone feels like they are not being heard, it's a beautiful thing to be able to cite the need to adhere to this core value, assuring they have the support of the team, the leadership, and the organization as a whole.

At my first company, Waer Systems, we addressed group support under the CoreVal of *Respect* like this:

- 🎧 We hold our colleagues, partners, and customers in high regard.
- 🎧 We are open about issues, plans, results, and problems.
- 🎧 We trust each other and are not shy of conflict-for-good.

This value made life better for all in the company because it provided a platform for difficult conversations. It allowed us to freely give and receive important feedback. What a gift to any team that is plagued by festering issues, such as someone's annoying habit or suffering through hurt feelings. This type of CoreVal effectively gives permission to take someone aside and provide feedback and also ensures it is done respectfully.



Culture, Values and Behaviours

The following values and behaviours define our culture. We believe that we are all equally accountable for our company values:

Integrity

- We act legally, ethically, and responsibly
- We make decisions in the interest of the long term
- We keep our promises

Respect

- We hold our colleagues, partners and customers in high regard
- We are open about issues, plans, results and problems
- We trust each other and are not shy of conflict-for-good

Commitment

- We care and we go the extra mile
- We are enthusiastic and maintain a positive attitude
- We know what we have to do and we get on with it

Technical Excellence

- We excel at what we do
- We embrace learning, change and new technologies
- We design and install good product

Waer Systems CoreVals and descriptive behaviors.



What about our CoreVals at Culture Czars? I will share our CoreVals and other corporate culture assets in the pages that follow. As we are a new and relatively small organization,

The Culture Fix

our CoreVals were developed within the last twelve months. They are firm, but we have intentionally left room for improvement and validation as we mature over the next year. We can say though that they *feel* good to us (which is the first step), and that we are already experiencing the expected benefits.

We discerned the values that were important to us and then articulated them with words from our lingo, like *sawubona*. Using our own stories and verbiage helped us capture the respect we have for our collective culture and the recognition we offer to each individual. We care how everyone is feeling and we make sure everyone is included. The word *sawubona* worked and was easily depicted by a human eye to further the message of “I see you.” We had our first value. We ruminated on it and asked ourselves in some quiet contemplation, *Does it feel real?* It did.

Next we discussed timeless traditions and the source of societal and familial values as they related to us. One recurring theme was the importance of doing what we said we would do and simply being *reliable*. Another was the universal experience of working through loss or pain to become a stronger, more evolved human. Regardless of the experiences, we kept showing up, and this led to the value of *stoicism*. How could this be any better represented than by the mighty baobab tree that is such a solid symbol of reliability, yielding its goodness season after season and millennia after millennia? It was also the right value upon which to hang our zest for life, which we deemed *life's love*. Using the baobab tree to symbolize these values felt real to us and unique to the culture we wanted to propagate.

Another value that coalesced during our brainstorming sessions was feeling blessed and lucky to have so much

knowledge, talent, and opportunity among us, as well as a desire to freely share and give back. I shared a story with the team of when my father was running a sheep research station in the Andes during my teenage years. He was assigned this fascinating project after his work in Zambia and later earned an OBE from the British government for his achievements in developing a new breed of sheep that thrived in the high elevations. I was on holiday from boarding school in Ireland and had just ridden a mule up to the *fiesta* that my father was hosting for the workers. I noticed that none of the men finished his beer. Every beer bottle on the table had some left in the bottom. Those drinking outside poured the last sips of beer on the ground. I wondered why people who appeared to have so little would waste their drink. Later that day, I asked my father. He explained that it was *abundancia*, meaning “I have enough.” They demonstrated this shared value by refusing the last drop. I realized that even though they appeared to have so little, they were content and lived their lives with an attitude of abundance.

The story resonated with the team and it captured our value. When hiring, we wanted to bring in others with the same value. We wanted people who could see endless possibilities and could focus on abundance rather than scarcity. This value was captured by the word *abundancia*. Based on the Bible verse, “My cup runneth over,” we depicted it with an image of an overflowing cup.

At Culture Czars, we found our CoreVals and associated imagery to be so self-explanatory that fewer descriptive behavior words were required. A word like *Churchillian*, for example, needs little embellishment because much of this great man’s values are summed up in the mention of his name. Most

The Culture Fix

people know what he stood for in terms of leadership, determination, and “never ever ever give up.” What applied to our team’s character more than anything was inspiration, exuberance, and humor. We are stirred by our mission and motivate others through our work. We are exuberant too and embrace humor. These are the aspects from Churchill that we lift up and honor most in our work together. Because CoreVals tie together and are used in concert with one another, we didn’t need to go with fortitude or stoicism because they were already covered by baobab. Churchill and baobab together were covering more of our sacred ground. This felt like it was working and it will for you too when you go through the process.

Baobab, Sawubona, Abundancia, and Churchillian. Did they feel real? Yes, very much so. Once we identified the values, we applied meaningful badges or nick-names to them and created the imagery or icons that supported them. The end result is what we hope you will achieve: captured values that are brought alive, easily communicated and remembered, easily adopted and reinforced.

We now have our own language for our “tree house” and it helps us communicate efficiently, remain on the same page, and make decisions guided by our principles. It is easy to say “let’s be sure to delight the client with this delivery” or “what else can we give?” or “do you think we made them feel included enough?”

Since it is often helpful to observe the process of going from core values to a valued culture before embarking on your own, I will continue to share Culture Czars progression. In the chapters that follow you will see how we carried our CoreVals forward into our CoreWorkflow and finally our CoreChart.



CoreVals should be real and existing—not wishful thinking. There are such things as dormant virtues. As you move through culture-building, you will animate your company's most important values. Take the discernment and description tasks seriously until you find and awaken them. Enlivening culture is a process, but once set in motion, it keeps building and evolving in the right direction. One other important element that lends perspective to this process is knowing the company's collective purpose or vision. It is the essential glue that binds coworkers to coworkers as well as the whole team to its leadership. I like to call this the CorePurpose—the overarching company goal and reason for being.

CorePurpose is the *why* and *what* for the business. It tells employees what they are working toward and why. It is motivating and energizing, and somehow comforting. Once spelled out, a company's purpose gives everyone a reason to *be*, to work, and to believe in what they are doing. While CoreVals will help employees in your company love *where* they work, the CorePurpose will help them love *why* they work.

Some employees may get this intrinsically from their work and coworker admiration because they are A-players who are motivated and love what they do. A statement that provides purpose and meaning will help everyone feel this way about their work because they will all understand why it matters. You can see how vital it is to precisely detail your company's values and purpose so they can guide your team's actions. In this way, everyone becomes a leader, and you really are solving C-suite problems at the ground level before they even begin.

Thoughts from a Culture Czar

“*[Culture] is not something that you can rank and put on the back burner to focus on later. It's something that needs to be focused on every single day, but in small increments. You're living the core values and you have a strong, healthy culture—or you don't. We've seen the moods of offices increase and decrease, so just like in a household, everybody could be crabby for awhile, [or] everybody could be in a great mood. We see that going on in offices and we'll do something proactive to be able to create a more positive environment...but it doesn't change the overall culture of the company. Keeping a strong, healthy culture is something that we try to [focus on] every day.*”

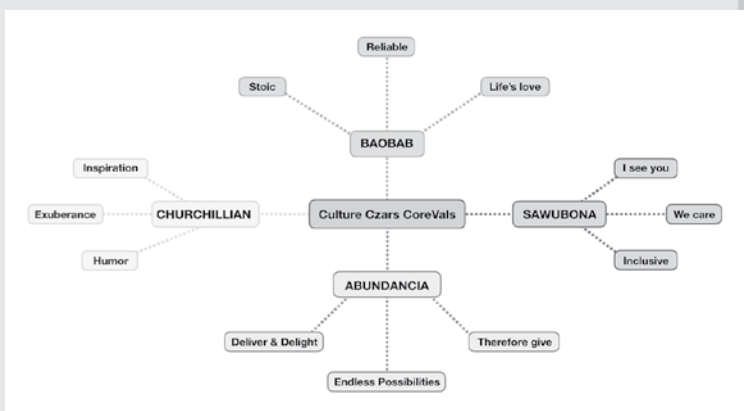
—TONY MIRCHANDANI,
CEO OF RTM ENGINEERING CONSULTANTS

EXERCISE 3: DESCRIBE

Break out the markers and hit the white board with your Culture Czars. Let's get to the core of your company's beliefs and words to live by. Put all your ideas into the grinder and keep turning until you're left with bite-sized nuggets of wisdom. You can use the examples in this chapter as guidelines for your finished product.

From the five to eight major values you listed in Exercise 2, choose your priorities. Three or four are ideal, six is the recommended maximum. It has been my experience over countless interviews with employees that they can rarely remember more than four. Beneath those, list the most succinct descriptors from your white board session.

Try to avoid hackneyed and overused values like *respect* and *integrity*, unless you assign them deeper meanings. Then spend some time wordsmithing until you are done. Hopefully, you will have some catch phrases, rhymes, acronyms, or something so unique that you are the only company in the world with that value. As an example, see the results below that Culture Czars attained when we went through our own process.



Final Culture Czars CoreVals



To review in more detail, visit www.cultureczars.com



COREVAL 1

COREVAL 2

COREVAL 3

COREVAL 4

(COREVAL 5)

(COREVAL 6)



PART TWO: **THRIVE**

Take Your Core Values to the People
(and Beyond)

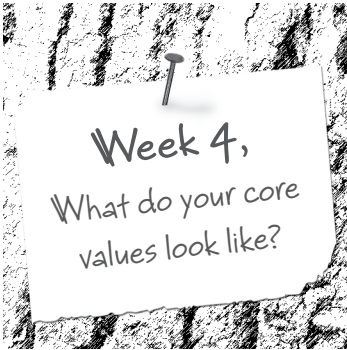
- ✓ Design
- ✓ Decree
- ✓ Dictate

CHAPTER 4

Design

*With deep-struck, reverential awe,
The learned Sire and Son I saw:
To Nature's God, and Nature's law,
They gave their lore;
This, all its source and end to draw,
That, to adore.*

—ROBERT BURNS, THE VISION



YOUR MISSION IN PART

Two of this book is to get some creative input and decide on a theme and style for print materials, meeting agendas, and the core values rollout event itself. It will also help you memorialize your core values so that others will remember them.

The suspense and excitement among your leadership team and the passion of your Culture Czars will grow as you plan how to bring your message to the masses. In order for your values, your people, and your company's culture to thrive, you must integrate your newly clarified CoreVals into everyday life in the workplace.

Creating print displays for your core values and their descriptors is a must. Unless CoreVal words are highlighted in some graphic way and hung on the wall, they really don't exist and aren't part of the culture. Simply having them in

an email or on the company wiki/intranet is not effective. I like to see CoreVals on posters, pocket cards, and put in front of everybody in creative ways via customized key rings, coffee mugs, or some other everyday item—especially if it is pertinent to your business. Home screen displays for any digital device is probably the single most effective display you could choose as well as laptop stickers. Office posters, or even a mural, will also be effective. Keeping CoreVals hidden suggests the company is not proud enough or serious enough about them. You'll need several print iterations of your descriptive core values, which ideally are part of a multimedia affair. The big reveal should happen at a company-wide gathering. However you connect with your team, your delivery system will be a thoughtfully composed speech that sums up your vision for the company's culture.



The Lextech's CoreVals mural.

The Culture Fix

The best way to start showcasing your core values is to get your core team together and decide on a theme first. It doesn't have to be fun or funny—let it reflect your organization's style or market niche. If you're a bunch of academics, maybe riffing on titles of the classics will work for you. If you're people-oriented like SABRE, pictures of customers can drive home your sincerity about your values. If you work with children, like the therapists at Lumiere Children's Therapy, small hands or toy trains add meaning to the words on the wall.

Take special care in designing your visual theme because it will get a lot of use. Spinoffs from the all-important poster might include website decor, “flash” cards that you hand out to all employees, or promotional items emblazoned with your CoreVals. One effective theme was devised by the science fiction fans at the email security firm, Vircom.

 Get It Done! <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Commits, delivers• Results-oriented• No excuses, no bullshit	 Find a Better Way! <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Always solving and improving• Overcomes obstacles• Undaunted by failure
 Delight Your Customer! <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exceeds expectations• Listens, understands, then <u>acts</u>• Respects and empathizes	 Always keep learning! <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learns enthusiastically and applies• Shares, teaches• Seeks feedback

Vircom's *Star Trek*-themed core values poster.

Here is a visual about values that is instantly recognizable to large segments of the general population. In considering what would illustrate their values, the core team at Vircom realized that four iconic characters from the *Star Trek* television show and films embodied their traits. Captain Kirk, Scotty, Mr. Spock, and Bones fiercely display their values in their roles. These personal and shared values are things everyone can relate to, and they definitely bring their CoreVals alive. Vircom also has its CoreVals displayed prominently on the company website for the world to see. This language is so engrained at Vircom that one entire value theme can be summed up with a simple reference to Scotty and his *Get it Done* ways.

A common misconception is that core values are for internal consumption only—that they will never be communicated outside the organization. That's a big mistake and a lost opportunity.

Remember that all eyes may be on your display someday. A common misconception is that core values are for internal consumption only—that they will never be communicated outside the organization. That's a big mistake and a lost opportunity. CoreVals can be effective when floated downstream to customers and the general public, and upstream to vendors and colleagues. It helps spread your unique culture to the greater community, aligning your best clients and vendors with your company's mission. When difficult conversations become necessary with clients and vendors, or even your company's attorneys, accountants, and other service people, those discussions are made easier with the use of core values. You have an objective rationale for your actions and can do what has to be done without provoking personal animosity.

The Culture Fix

If they're already aware of these criteria, so much the better.

Remember you are leading a culture that extends beyond the four walls of the company. Take Vircom's first CoreVal, *Get It Done*. Its descriptive behavior says, "Make commitments and deliver; be results oriented without any excuses." Let's say Vircom was selecting a new vendor or partner. During the interview, they might mention, "We work best with partners that fit our culture and subscribe to our values. Are you ready to be held accountable to our *Get It Done* core value?" If so, when it comes to onboarding, Vircom could ask them to display the company's CoreVals prominently in front of the team that will be working on its account. If and when the vendor has a disruption in service and tries to make excuses for not delivering, Vircom's conversation is a lot easier. They also have a better chance of maintaining a successful relationship and getting service back on track by referencing core values instead of the service level agreement. An appeal to the vendors' best human nature may actually be stronger than a binding legal document. This is just one way CoreVals can extend beyond the corporation and be used to lead a culture, not just a company. The same logic applies downstream of your business too. Have you noticed that your best clients or customers are those that align with your values?

Your organization's CoreVals may not lend themselves to outside themes like superheroes or starship officers. Instead, you can personalize them through the use of the stories associated with your business, as SABRE did with its use of real-life "heroes." The SABRE core team identified employees and customers who represent distinct values—like the Uber driver who does her job with confidence because she is empowered to prevent an attack, or the child safety expert who displays

Will Scott

his passion for protection as a trainer for the SABRE Personal Safety Academy.



CORE VALUES

Proud & passionate

We are proud of our mission to save and our global leading brands

We are passionate about our heroes, our team, and our customers



SABRE Hero Gary Sikorski



Empowered

We evolve and solve

We're fired up

Prepared & engaged

We plan for the best and prepare for the worst

We are condition yellow



SABRE Hero Maria Metts



Go the extra mile

We care and we do whatever it takes

We save lives

SABRE's Core Values Poster



To review in more detail, visit www.cultureczars.com

As you go about this creative process, be thinking ahead. How will you use your presentation to keep your CoreVals in the minds of employees daily, weekly, and monthly? We'll get to the functional use of meeting time to remind folks of your company's values and purpose in Chapter 5. Now, I'd like to introduce a key way to get those sentiments off the wall and into your people's psyches via the monthly award.

Off the Wall and into Hearts and Minds

Acknowledging your staff's work is part of good business management. Tying that recognition to your core values is one more way to bring them front and center, and to show how integral they are to daily operations. You can use company lore to illustrate CoreVals, much like using word problems to make arithmetic more germane to students. If you hand out a \$5 gift card to your top salesperson once a month, people will just yawn and go back to their desks. If you show your gratitude for demonstrating a value that defines your group, *based on company history that everyone knows*, you've got context. You've got Aha! moments. You are also tapping emotions, making people feel connected and, of course, having fun. Before you know it, you've got people doing their best to be next in line for that prize. We're not just talking about a free coffee at Starbucks. Make it something that people really want and will appreciate. One way to do this is to ask your team what their interests are and what would make them feel special. Show that you've made an effort to make the prize personal to the individual.

Once again, the folks at SABRE handled this task with style. They take nominations from the employees themselves for the coworker who best lives up to one of the company's CoreVals that month. And they do it for every department.

Then, everyone gets together in the warehouse and one member of the leadership team announces the winner of the “228 Award.” Stories are told, values are reinforced, and one person from each department goes home with a \$250 gift certificate. The sum is rounded up from \$228—the amount of money that Larry Nance initially invested to found SABRE in 1975. Do you think any member of SABRE has forgotten about the roots of their business? Not a chance. Where the company came from is an important part of its current identity. It’s one of the things in which people take pride. Reminding the staff of this every month keeps that particular value alive. At these gatherings, it is important not to just name the winner, but to tell the story behind the nomination and the CoreVal for which the employee was nominated. To show that culture extends beyond the internal organization, even I was awarded SABRE’s Empowered Award for helping the corporation “evolve and solve” its cultural challenges.



PROJECT 228

A monthly \$228 bonus recognizing the best employee examples of our core values

In 1975, at the young age of 27, Larry Nance took a major leap of faith and invested his entire savings into starting Security Equipment Corporation. That \$228.00 investment along with the hard work of SABRE Team

Members has led to over 4 decades of success and SABRE – Security Equipment Corporation becoming the #1 pepper spray sold worldwide. From young students to men in uniform, SABRE has increased the personal safety of tens of millions. Our hard work has also resulted in approximately 14,000 free mammograms to support the fight against breast cancer. There are a number of very impressive milestones and accomplishments to celebrate.

Speaking of celebration, in honor of our founder and the foundation of success and hard work he created for us, we would like to honor one team member each month whose efforts most closely resemble our core values.



Proud & Passionate

- We are proud of our mission to save and our global leading brands
- We are passionate about our heroes, our team, and our customers

Empowered

- We evolve and solve
- We're fired up

Prepared and Engaged

- We plan for the best and prepare for the worst
- We are condition yellow

Go the Extra Mile

- We care and we do whatever it takes
- We save lives

Team members from each division will email their Team Leader on the last day of each month. You have the opportunity to vote for one person per core value, but you must provide a specific example as to why you are voting for that person for that core value. You can vote for yourself.

You do not have to nominate someone for each of the 4 core values.

The Team Leader will review all submissions and the person with the most nominations and best examples per team, will receive \$228.00.

SABRE's Project 228 Award recognizing employees who exemplify core values.



To review in more detail, visit www.cultureczars.com

Mike Petsalis, CEO of Vircom, hands out statuettes of the *Star Trek* characters to everyone in the company who is “caught committing a core value” that month. These are vintage models found on Ebay. He has resisted handing out financial rewards, not because of budget, but because the statuettes are so highly valued by his team. One month, he didn’t bother handing out the statuettes and the winners came to his office in protest. These seemingly simple things can take on great importance at little cost.



Vircom's statuettes, awarded by the CEO for employees who exemplify core values.

How will you create a means of recognition that ties your values to the company image? If you’ve given your CoreVals personas, you have all kinds of creative outlets. If not, delve deeper for ideas from the stories that generated your work, as well as those your work generated. Customer testimonials are gold mines of positive evidence. If you don’t have those and your products or services are reviewed by the public—maybe on Amazon or such ratings websites as Yelp or TripAdvisor—you can read through the reviews for ideas. What do people like or think is unique about your organization? When you know what is already memorable, you can capitalize on that.

The Culture Fix

Now, let's take both the graphic display and engagement with your audience to its final rendition.

Showcase Your Core Values

How will you get eyes on your imagery? Again, you'll convene your core team to work out the final logistics. How many posters will you need? Where will you put them? Can you link them to other displays in your office space? At Lextech, our poster depicting *The Core* was prominently displayed around our offices and was adopted as the desktop wallpaper or home screen on many computers. We also dedicated one wall at the end of the hall to a mural of the personas.



Lextech's *The Core* poster displayed throughout its office spaces.

I loved that this was the first thing my prospective clients or employees saw in an online meeting or webinar. The fanciful expression of our CoreVals—with thoughtful, serious sentiments spelled out alongside the superheroes—told them exactly what it would be like to work with Lextech. How can your company make such a statement? Maybe you have a “wall of fame” with plaques for achievements the business has earned, or portraits of company leaders or employees of the month. Maybe your office has a dramatic architectural feature that draws the eye. Your CoreVals poster might make a nice centerpiece. Wherever you put it, find ways to draw attention to it and make it a focal point for office tours and group photos. If your team shares goodies on a regular basis, put the plate of jelly doughnuts on a table beneath the poster. When you take group photos, you know where to stage them. Keep the display prominent and attractive—don’t let cobwebs, real or metaphorical, gather and dull the shine on your masterpiece.

The Culture Fix



Culture, Vision, Mission & Product Pride

The following values and behaviors define our culture. We believe that we are all accountable for our corporate values and for maintaining our culture and how we work together.

Proud & Passionate

We are proud of our mission to save and our global leading brands

We are passionate about our heroes, our team and our customers

Empowered

We evolve and solve

We are fired up

Prepared & Engaged

We plan for the best and prepare for the worst

We are condition yellow

Go the Extra Mile

We care and we do whatever it takes

We save lives

SABRE's core values displayed on cubicle cards.

There are many unconventional and creative ways to showcase your CoreVals. Recall the set of costumes my Lex-tech team gave me in honor of *The Core* characters. Besides my Captain Client getup, I had a Danny Deliver, UPS-like outfit, dressed up with a courier cape and a stuffed cheetah, indicating speed. Danny ostensibly carried our *Deliver Success* value to wherever it was needed most, in a hurry. I dressed up in ninja clothing to play teamwork alter-egos Tea



To review in more detail, visit www.cultureczars.com

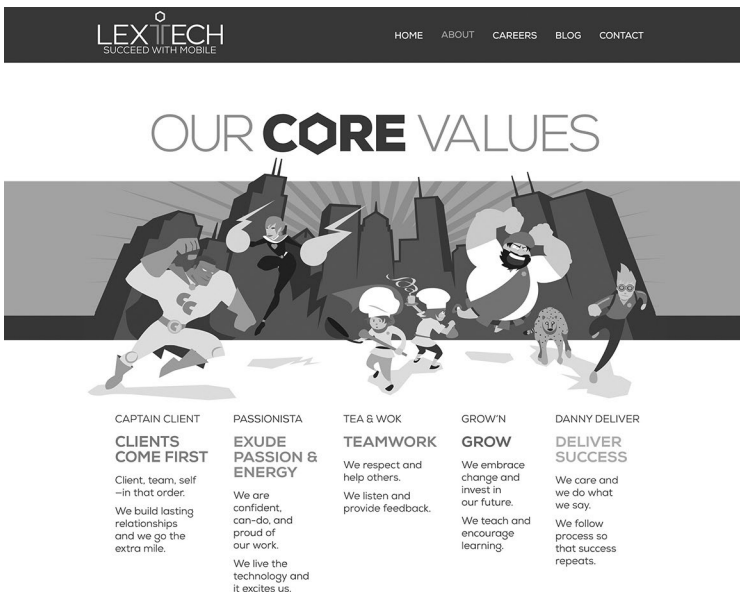
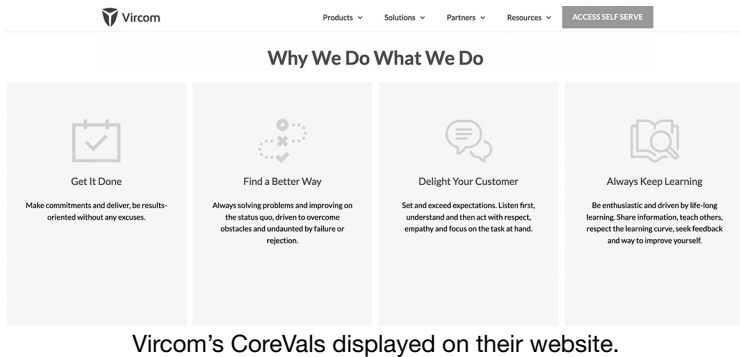
and Wok, and in Scottish garb to play Grow'n. Having no shame and an ample sense of humor, I happily donned a tight bustier when Passionista paid a visit to our Town Hall meeting. I begin each team meeting by telling a story about which employee was being honored with the CoreVal award that week. This was an effective way to make the core values thrive and encourage the behaviors that we wanted the team to emulate. These are examples of literally embodying core values in a visually memorable—albeit slightly nutty—way.



Costumes donned to
resent Lextech's *The Core*

Finally, you'll want to dream up how to move your CoreVals and artwork in front of people outside the business. Your website home page or mobile app's welcome screen are easy, perpetual display sites. Promotional product companies can help you find giveaways—like pens, key fobs, or coffee mugs—on which to print some portion of your core values and graphic images.

The Culture Fix



Have fun with this part of the Culture Czars process. It may feel particularly satisfying because it uses both sides of your brain or because it connects the people inside your organization to the larger world. With your CoreVals created and displayed in the office, you are one step closer to the big day—your launch party.

Thoughts from a Culture Czar

“Most of us frankly just pass [posters] by because we become numb to them. You must indeed figure out a way to live the values. That means that, for instance, in the awarding of rock stars every week, we asked every manager to submit a name.... That's one way we live it. The other way is to talk about it in team meetings.... Make sure you're having conversations about it, then ask the group to tell you examples of how we've been living our values.... You have to talk about [core values], and consistency is so critical in the success of any organization. Whether it's consistent in delivering our menu or producing a product. It's the same thing around core values. You have to be consistent in how you talk about them. You have to be good examples of them. Then, you have to continue to communicate them over and over and over again.... We may know what they are, but do we really practice them?”

—DEE ROBINSON, FOUNDER AND
CEO OF ROBINSON HILL