

Jeff had been through new employee orientation. His resume was stellar. He had completed the in-house job training with flying colors. His first nine months on the job showed great potential. So how could he have made such a boneheaded decision that put the organization's reputation on the line with a major stakeholder!

What would you do to avoid a repeat of Jeff's scenario? Publicly chastise Jeff so everyone is afraid to make that mistake again? Revamp procedures with more forms, checkboxes, and accountability? Perhaps decide to make those decisions yourself since you obviously can't trust anyone else?

All these solutions fail to get to the root of the problem. If you want to paralyze your staff and cap your organizational growth, just do those repeatedly. (OK, there is a place for revamping procedures, but be careful: You can grow a big bureaucracy and still not address every contingency.)

*I thought I did what  
you thought you  
told me...*



You want to empower others to make good decisions without you. But there are too many variants to train them to be ready for every potential decision. The solution is to go deep and train the *values* that drive their decisions.

Every action, every decision, is driven by values whether we realize it or not. When our values are skewed, we make bad choices. Our value for instant gratification drives choosing short-term pleasures over long-term results. Our value for avoiding conflict makes us procrastinate that conversation we know we should have.

It's true knowing a value doesn't automatically translate into executing it. But that's a topic for another time. The point I want to make here is this: *If your followers don't know your values, you are unreasonable to expect them to act on them.*

Look at your employee orientation materials, employee handbook, and other training curriculum, blogs, and organizational communication. Are they all about how to know the rules, follow procedures, and use the systems? Or do they communicate the values that led you to create the rules, procedures, and systems?

Here are four tips on how to embed the values you care about into your culture:

- 1. Articulate values well.** Lay a clear, unambiguous foundation you can build on. Clear to you will still be ambiguous to others. Expect that and work on it.
- 2. Talk about values often.** In formal and informal settings. Make it a two-way conversation, inviting feedback and questions to increase clarity. Be ready to wrestle with conflicts between values until boundaries become clear.
- 3. Illustrate values with stories.** Stories of successes and failures. Stories influence our motivations in ways mere statements don't. We see ourselves in the stories and want to be the heroes, not the villains.
- 4. Expect/give values accountability.** Affirmative accountability when values are demonstrated, coaching conversations when they're not. Invite followers to hold you accountable and ask when they see you do something they don't perceive as consistent with stated values. Be honest when you blow it.

The deeper the values are ingrained, the more consistent the decisions become.

*enLumen Leadership Services: Turning Leadership Potential into Leadership Success*