

Connecting to Our Values

The song stated, “When everything’s made to be broken, I just want you to know who I am.” When every part of the business can be pivoted and changed, what is the meaning of the business? Business is a human activity meant to satisfy a human need and humans are meant to connect with others. We connect by sharing something; some values, some beliefs, some common pains, etc. Selling is a spiritual interaction between the values of the seller and the values of the buyer.

In the 1920’s and 1930’s, we had massive social changes and major economic disruptions with refugees streaming from one part of the country to another. During such tough times, we coped by identifying our fundamental values and building a new life based on those values. We still sing some of the songs written then identifying American values with images of “amber waves of grain” and “from sea to shining sea”.

Strong businesses are built on values. These are often driven by the board or top executives. When the world is swirling chaos around us, we do best when we identify and connect with our values.

Values of a company are rarely found on nice motivational posters. Values show up in the tough decision points – when a company “fires” a good paying customer because of what they have done, or when a company shuts down a profitable business line, or when senior executives are fired for their behavior.

Our values define our future and ethics gives a path to that future.

In chaotic times, nobody knows what will happen. We make choices, not based on knowledge, but on our values. We then measure the outcome and see what further changes we need to make.

A few core values speak louder than many conflicting values. We do well to identify the few real core values than to try to have many.

Our Values Determine Our Future

Our past can restrict our ability to change and handle the chaos. Often, we are the limiting factor in our ability to react to new situations because of past actions. We can benefit from examining how we made decisions in the past, learn from them, and

learn new ways to process situations and make better decisions in the future. We clean up our actions so to better connect with our own values.

When connecting with our values to make decisions, we need to ask “what will we never do no matter how much it costs not to do that?” We open ourselves up to be measured by others. We ask what is driving us to make this specific decision and back off of decisions based on fear, ambition, or grudging duty. We become connected to integrity.

Rarely does a “values driven” business have competition. When we operate upon our values, we provide a clear message to the community. We have success because we measure the results by our own values.

We build purpose and community with our values.

Hearing the bad news

In recent years, several notable world leaders didn’t want to hear the bad news. One surrounded himself with people who would tell him what he wanted to hear. When he acted on that and found strong resistance, he was shocked. Another tried to change the bad news into what he wanted it to be. Both failed.

When we don’t hear the bad news, we operate with blind spots. We can totally miss opportunities or major issues developing. Managers who fail to hear the bad news often get surprised by competitors and by projects failing. Employees who do not feel safe to share bad news will hide issues or attempt to work around problems. Many times, that results in making a small problem into a large one.

Leaders who don’t want to hear the bad news can discount the messenger, act as if they didn’t hear that person speaking, or try to silence the person bringing the bad news. All of these tend to reduce trust. When we don’t hear the bad news, we reduce our effectiveness and the team is less competitive. In some cases, not hearing the bad news means that we are shocked when authorities show up or reporters want to talk to us.

Sometimes only comedians and children are able to say the truth.

Are you hearing the bad news? Smart leaders have always found advisors who could tell them the bad news. Others have also stepped outside of their usual circles to ask outsiders what they thought. It takes strength and effort to find those who will tell the truth from their perspective. Yet, “the truth shall set you free”.

How often are you surprised by events? It could be because you are not hearing the bad news.

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Risky World

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