



Inside the Box: Leading With Corporate Values to Drive Sustained Business Success

David S. Cohen

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Inside the Box: Leading With Corporate Values to Drive Sustained Business Success David S. Cohen **How to turn company values into competitive advantage**

We are inclined, for whatever reason, to treat values like works of art. We view them as nice to hang on the wall, and beautiful to look at, but we don't act as though they truly mean much to us in the real world. In fact, the opposite is true. The best organizations understand their values, articulate them clearly, and hold them higher than any short-term concerns or short-cut methods. This does not put these companies at a competitive disadvantage. It is the source of their competitive advantage.

If there's no clarity at the top about what values really mean, then there's no consistency at the management level or further down the organization. This means that there's no way to measure, coach, assess, promote or fire people in line with those values. Any organization that does not articulate its values concretely functions like a modern Tower of Babel. No one can be quite sure that they are speaking the same language at different levels or different locations within the organization. Decisions don't always make sense or feel right. Confusion reigns. No matter how compelling and inspirational the organization's vision may be, its aspirations fall far short in reality.

Values are about achieving results in a way that is consistent with what an organization stands for. They provide a direct connection between the CEO, the factory worker and everyone in between; and form the basis of the organization's "brand" as understood by employees, customers, suppliers and even shareholders. When the work is done right, values provide an organizing principle, a directional compass that helps organizations succeed; they become a source of energy for an organization's vision, strategy and day-to-day efforts. Vision, strategy, market share, reputation and profits are all very important – but having a clear and consistent set of values is far more critical in predicting whether an organization will continue to succeed and grow as its people, markets, competitive landscape and technology change. People must make their contributions to an organization willingly and independently to bring passion, commitment, creativity and energy to a job. But they will do so only so long as they believe that what they are doing is authentic and meaningful, and is part of a code of commitment shared by the organization as a whole.

Inside the Box focuses on values in a clear and practical way to understand what they are, where they come from and how they are transmitted from employee generation to generation. *Inside the Box* provides a roadmap for any leader or manager on how to identify the values that make an organization, department, team, or individual unique. It also shows how to measure whether an organization or individual is operating according to those values, and how managers can use values as the basis for all of their people decisions and drive superior performance as a result.

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