



Understanding Values, Sharing Common Goals



It's not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are. ~ Walt Disney

You'd think that it'd be easier for smaller companies to be focused and working in tandem toward common goals. But the truth is that having team unity and seeing growth in productivity is difficult, no matter the size.

This is partly due to the entrepreneurial spirit of smaller companies. They are usually founded off of great ideas by excited, energetic and brilliant do-ers. But then, as all companies do, they grow into a business that, no matter the size, needs structure, vision and common ground. It can be a problem, for sure, but nothing that team building – having shared values and shared language - can't fix.



The Client

Inverse-Square is a custom software development shop based in Indianapolis. With a total of 12 workers, the group focuses on business process automation. Located in the Stutz Building, the office is filled with bright orange umbrellas and boasts a skyline view of downtown from its wall of windows. President Bob Baird founded the company based on a passion for providing clients with technical services, but with a personal, humanistic approach.

So when it came time to coordinate the annual staff retreat, Bob wanted part of the focus to be on team values and the development of a shared language. That's when he invited Deseri Garcia, Vida Aventura president and founder, to be a part of the process.



The Challenge

Identifying core values within a company is crucial for every aspect of business. Without them, teams often flounder with decisions and actions, due to a lack of clear vision or purpose. Bob was set on exploring this area at the retreat by pinpointing the foundations of company culture, and ultimately finding five team values that everyone could get behind.



The Process

Deseri led the team through a series of exercises that included helping individuals find personal focus. She also had the team use a deck of "value cards" in order to begin the process of identifying and narrowing down personal values.

"It wasn't as easy as you might think," Bob said. "And it was really fascinating to watch everyone struggle with the task, because you could gradually see what was really important to them."

As the team worked through the activity, Deseri posed questions that helped them shift their mindset from their personal life to their work life, and how values transition over to business.

“Personally, I had family really high on my personal values list, and I soon realized that this translates to the workplace in the form of community,” said Bob. “Once we all had our personal top five, we grouped similar words together and then narrowed that list down, focusing on the top five values that the group had in common. It was a really cool experience.”

An icon consisting of a blue line graph with three points and a magnifying glass with an orange handle and lens, positioned over the second point of the graph.

Insight and Results

Defining and knowing corporate values allows team members to approach problems and find solutions in ways that honor them. “Those values – the intangible things we hold dear – serve as a guide,” Bob said. “They’re like bumper rails - or filters - that we can pass hard decisions through in order to move forward.”

Inverse-Square has already integrated the lessons learned into various aspects of the business, including the hiring process. For example, keeping in mind that supporting the community is one of their company values, if a job candidate emphasizes a need to be independent and work alone, then they’re probably not going to be a good fit in a collaborative, community-centered environment.

Knowing common values also helps when it comes to making key business decisions. In the case of a difficult client, for instance, if they don’t respect the community, or they operate in ways that directly conflict with company values, then chances are it’s just not going to be a good business fit. Letting that business relationship go might be best for all involved.

As a result of Deseri’s involvement in the retreat, Bob said the team realized the importance of having a shared language. The exercises provided clarity for what Inverse-Square already had, and helped them develop new vision for what they needed.

“In our line of work, it’s easy to appreciate an expert in the technical world – like, ‘Hey, he’s a really good data base guy!’” said Bob. “But it’s not always easy in other fields. Deseri is an expert at what she does, and man, she works magic, because she’s so good! The value of having an expert like her help out your team – it’s so worth it.”

An icon showing two interlocking puzzle pieces, one blue and one orange.

What Are Your Values?

Have you or your company gone through the process of identifying core values that help guide your decisions? If not, what problems do you think your team is experiencing from the lack of focus or poorly defined common language?