

mission & values

Staff belief in the purpose, work and values of their organisation

Research conducted by Voice Project has shown that employees' belief in the mission and values of their organisation is the strongest driver of employee engagement. This connection between purpose and passion is strong across sectors, industries and all types of staff – both front-line delivery and back-office employees. Practices that support organisational purpose and values meet basic human needs of meaning, stability, esteem, and belonging.

suggested actions

- **communicate** Employees need a well-formulated purpose (not a mission statement that is little more than public relations ploy) that offers something for people to commit to, with leaders providing clear, consistent, frequent and inspiring messages about direction and values. Keep mission and values part of everyday conversation in the organisation, and on meeting agendas. Invite employees to discuss what the values mean in action to help ensure alignment. Put them in documents, posters, websites and other media to help staff remember them.
- **select** Attract and select people who are already predisposed to sharing the organisation's values. People are attracted by the values of an organisation that are consistent with their own, so communicate these values in your recruitment brand. Build on this information in initial interviews so that candidates are more likely to self-select appropriately. Include assessment against organisational values in structured interviews.
- **orient** Design a compulsory, formal orientation that includes the organisation's history, philosophy, and how the values are 'lived' in the organisation. Ensure new recruits have the opportunity to meet senior executives, observe role models, receive positive support from and spend social time with organisational 'insiders'. Assess best practices and problems of socialisation processes from the perspective of newcomers.
- **celebrate & reward** Tell stories about actions that reflect the mission and values, especially difficult choices, to reinforce and celebrate what your organisation stands for. Articulate, evaluate and reward behaviours that support the values.
- **create meaning** Help people to understand the link between their work and the end user of your products or services, and why their role is important. For example, build purpose and impact statements into job descriptions and role orientation, or put up posters for staff on an assembly floor showing where their part fits in the whole, and customers using the product.
- **align** Talking up values and purpose is a double-edged sword. Employees who are personally aligned with your mission and values will also be more conscious of, and frustrated by, structures that are out of alignment. Constantly evaluate decisions, strategy, systems, policies, practices and people against your values and purpose. Refer to values when communicating the reason for changes and choices.

case study

HammondCare is a not-for-profit organisation with a reputation as one of Australia's most innovative health and aged care organisations, with over 2000 staff and 2500 clients. It consistently achieves ratings of above 90% Favourable for staff belief in Mission and Values. Typical comments from staff include "people all have the same attitude", "honest belief in core values and ability to hire staff that believe same", "walks its talk", "staff believe their jobs are important and worthwhile". Stephen Judd, Chief Executive of HammondCare, says this strong culture is achieved through selection, alignment of practices with values, and handling hard decisions.

"I'm pretty passionate about getting recruitment right. We don't hire on the basis of knowledge and skills, we hire on the basis of attitude. So lots of people in our industry would say, must have knowledge of this or must have that certificate. You can teach that. We prefer to say you've got a really good attitude, we'll train you. In our aged care services for example, we really only want people who actively enjoy working with older people. Core values articulate to people what we want them to believe in and why they shouldn't be working with us if they don't. Too many people hire on the basis of knowledge and fire on the basis of attitude".

At orientation Stephen talks about what the mission and values mean in practice. For example, values of choice and flexibility in residential services mean "that you don't get people up at eight o'clock and shower them and get them all together for meals. Let them sleep in! Have breakfast anytime from midnight till noon." This has meant that all structures, practices and policies come under the 'values' microscope – including job roles.

While people are happy to sign up to the values in theory, when it comes to practice there can be some resistance – "they're actually pretty hard to do". He talks about a senior staff member who was behaving in a way that was contrary to the values of the organisation. "I talked to [that person] within the day, I think it's really important to confront those things immediately and I followed it up in writing. They knew it was serious when I did that."

While Stephen acknowledges the importance of communication, he says the best way to bring people on board "is by some of the hard actions you take. If you've got an instance of proven elder abuse, are you going to go through process, first warning, second warning, over a period of months? Are you afraid if you don't do that you'll expose the organisation to an unfair dismissal? If that's the case, you are saying you are more concerned about litigation risk than risk to those in your care. You are what you tolerate and your actions show what your real drivers are".

useful resources

- Collins, J. C. & Porras, J. I. (1994). **Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies**. New York: HarperBusiness and see <http://www.jimcollins.com>
- Parkes, L. (2008). **Purpose, Engagement and Change**. Illuminations 1, 4-6. <http://admin.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/Illuminations%202008-06.pdf>
- Sisodia, R. S., Wolfe, D. B., & Seth, J. N. (2007). **Firms of Endearment: The Pursuit of Purpose and Profit**. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Wharton School of Publishing.
- <http://www.valuescentre.com> and <http://www.valuesatwork.org>
- Judd, S., Robinson, A., & Errington. (2012). **Driven by Purpose: Charities that make the difference**. Greenwich, Australia: HammondPress.