

Hello everyone. This is Wayne Rivers at FBI where *We Build Better Contractors*.

This week I want to talk about the leadership initiative that matters most. I've told you before about the CEO newsletter that I get every morning, and a writer named Dan Russell from RHR International wrote this article, and I think this is exactly his title, the Leadership Initiative that Matters the Most.

So, he starts off, workplace culture has changed since 2020, hasn't it? I think whether great changes or small changes we're all different from what we were three years ago in terms of how we think about leadership and managing our companies. And he writes that one clear differentiator between excellent leadership and average leadership has become creating shared values. Creating shared values is more important, it is more top of mind among leaders today than it ever was prior to 2020. In fact, he said this idea started growing in 2020 and it's just continued to accelerate ever since.

So, I'll be interested to hear from you in the comment section, do you agree that creating shared values is the leadership initiative that matters most or are there others that we need to consider? But let's go into his reasoning a little bit.

Well, now what about this is important to you? Obviously, we all want to be better leaders. We all want to know if there's a magic initiative, a magic concept that we can embrace and make us better leaders, by gosh, we'll do it. But he goes on to talk about the frustration that some leaders have that they don't feel like their employees are embracing their values, the company values to the extent the leaders do. And some leaders blame the employees. "They just don't get it. They don't understand. Why can't they just pick up the ball and run with it? I don't get it." And Russell writes, "When leaders start to blame their employees for not getting it, they have ceased to lead."

I mean, I think that's a fairly good point. Who feels most disconnected from the shared values of the CEO? Well, it's the people farthest away from the CEO on the org chart. The senior leadership team, the people that surround the CEO, yeah, they probably hear about it all the time, but it's the folks down away from the CEO, outside the executive suite that don't get to hear the message quite as much and it doesn't resonate with them quite the same way.

So, what are six ways that you can make this message stick? Some of these ideas came from a book by Andy Stanley, which I think was called *Making Your Value Stick*, something like that, in 2007. But anyway, a great book. And this article was thought-provoking as well.

So, the first way to make your values real and sticky, they've got to be simple and easily memorable. The one paragraph or the two, oh my gosh, it's just too much.

I remember reading one time that the most challenging type of writing was not writing an epic novel, it was writing a short story, because you had to cut and cut and cut and cut until the short story got down to its essence. That's the beauty of a short story. It's quick and it tells a story, and it pushes out a message quickly.

You've got to do the same thing with your values, same with your mission and vision. You've got to have something that's short and sticky. We build better contractors. All of our employees can say that mission at the drop of a hat. For our values, for making our values stick, we use a mnemonic. And so, it's team, T-E-A-M, and the first is T, trust, transparency and team play. The E is authentic example, that's my favorite, et cetera, et cetera. So, you've got to make it simple and memorable.

The second thing. The values have to accurately define your culture, not what you want your culture to be 25 years from now. There's got to be a bridge. There's got to be a bridge that you can use from where you are right now to where your culture is going to be in the next two or three years. So, you may need to rebuild the bridge as time goes by. But if your values are not resonating with your folks and they're not sticking, it could be because they perceive a disconnect between your high-minded values over here and your day-to-day execution over here. So, there's got to be congruence between the values and real life in the company.

The third thing. You've got to repeat the values, the mission, the vision ad nauseum. I feel like an idiot talking about it as much as I do. I feel like an old school marm and I'm making people recite things in class, but that's what we do, and it works for us. So, every meeting that we have starts out or concludes with a recitation of the vision, mission and values. So, we all have it, it's all top of mind. We all get our tank topped off at least once a week. And so it's always there for us front and center.

The fourth thing. This is a great thing. Recognize and celebrate when somebody lives your values. So that's another thing that we've tried to incorporate into our meetings. We talked about someone last week said that if we didn't do something, we wouldn't be an authentic example. So, we were actually making a short-term tactical decision based on one of our key values, being an authentic example to our members. And I thought that was wonderful. So, we want to recognize those occasions and celebrate them when our values come into real life use versus just being this ephemeral aspiration that we have.

We also talk about how specifically, what have you seen in the last week or so that causes you to think that we're building better contractors? And people say, "Well, a member called me and said this." Or "We did this for a member, and the administrative assistant immediately wrote a thank you note," or something like that. We want concrete examples where we can see that we're making an impact in the world.

The fifth thing. You've got to exemplify and model the values that you talk about. And here's an example. I remember a number of years ago a member called and he had a minority partner. And the minority partner was not living the company's values. He was not keeping promises, he was being untrue. Basically, he was living a lie. And everybody in the company knew it. The guy was kind of flamboyant and didn't make much of his secret about the carousing he was doing.

And I remember called, and he knew exactly what he needed to do. He just needed to hear it from me. How does that align with your values? And he said, "It absolutely doesn't." And I said, "What do you think you should do?" And he said, "I know what we have to do." And he did it, he did it, and the company has prospered.

The fear is if we lose a partner, an owner, a key business developer, or whatever he happens to be, we're going to suffer. This company did not suffer. This company has prospered since that move. And I think it sent the message loud and clear, we live our values, we are true to our values.

And the sixth thing. You've got to recognize slippage and course correct from time to time. When you see behavior that's not consistent with your values as in the previous example, you've got to correct it, you've got to make changes along the way. The values are permanent. All of us are just... No employee is permanent, none of us are permanent, but the values are permanent, and you've got to make course corrections. If you watch football, the quarterback calls an audible sometimes. That's what you have to do. You have to course correct.

All right, this is Wayne Rivers at FBI where *We Build Better Contractors*. Let us hear from you in the comments. Thank you.