

EMPLOYEES BRING COMPANY VALUES TO LIFE

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It sounds simple enough. Create a set of values that define your company culture, communicate those values to all employees, and encourage them to incorporate them into their work. But CEOs of today's leading companies know they didn't get there by only talking about their company's core values, they got there by actually living them.

So, how does a company 'live' its values?

It's not about creating a set of core values that define who you are as a company and putting them in a gilded frame on the wall for everyone to see. We make it our business at Brand Integrity to help companies take their values off the wall and get employees—from the janitor to the CEO—to live them in their daily work lives. It starts with a basic human truth: people who feel valued and appreciated will work harder, and the end result will be loyalty to the company.

After all, as British-American author Simon Sinek wisely notes, "Customers will never love a company until the employees love it first." That concept is evident in today's global workforce. Every company has laudable values—things like integrity, ownership, honesty, and innovation—but according to a recent Gallup survey, few organizations are able to bring those values to life. Only 27 percent of US employees believe in their company values according to the survey, while just 23 percent say they apply their company values on the job.

This isn't the case for HumanGood, one of the country's leading nonprofit providers of senior living communities. John Cochrane, CEO of the Pleasanton, CA-based company, recognized early on in his tenure the critical role employee engagement and company culture play in the overall customer experience.

How did they do it? It all starts with the CEO. In the case of HumanGood, Cochrane truly understood the connection between employee recognition and positive reinforcement to company values. Cochrane and senior leaders at the company consistently leverage an employee recognition platform to highlight and reward staff for exhibiting behaviors that reinforce company values. By citing specific examples in meetings, the word trickles down and soon becomes the topic of water cooler conversation.

Case in point: During a family meeting to discuss concerns, a HumanGood team member

discovered that a couple in her community was approaching a milestone wedding anniversary. Christine and her team arranged an intimate anniversary dinner for the couple, creating a memorable experience for the whole family. Comments on the platform were overwhelmingly positive. "This is HumanGood in action! I love being part of a team that creates such special moments."

This is just one example of the many stories Cochrane and other leaders write about on the platform, describing the impact it has on the business. Everyone reads it, colleagues affirm it by making positive comments, and it has the potential to become a company legend. The stories are told in one-minute reminders to all employees, and every meeting starts with a similar story about an employee who lives out the company values. It's about consistently connecting exhibited behaviors and stories to company values. Over time, those stories multiply, and employees think to themselves, "I can do that!" It starts as a grassroots movement within the company that grows over time, and soon becomes the company culture. It's the kind of action by employees that helps to increase resident/customer satisfaction and can lead to more referrals, higher occupancy, and better financial results.

But HumanGood takes it a step further. In an industry plagued by turnover, they start the process early by first recruiting and hiring people who believe in their company values. During initial interviews, they ask potential employees questions related to the company values and listen for specific examples of how they demonstrated those values in a previous job. New employees go through extensive values training during the onboarding process. The company taps into that early motivation to recognize and reward behaviors that reinforce company values from the very beginning.

The results have been remarkable.

HumanGood experienced a 27 percent decrease in nursing turnover in the first six months of employment and a 36 percent drop in total nursing turnover from 2014-16. In dining services, the numbers are even higher: a 48 percent decrease in total turnover from 2014-16, and a 51 percent drop in the first six months of employment. Overall, company profits grew by \$4 million, transforming the work environment and ultimately, the experience for residents who live there (and, by extension, their families too).

In the end, it's about making employees feel appreciated. Happy employees share their love for the company with the customer, and for the companies that get it right, the customer becomes a company champion.