

LESSON 25: Business Performance

Exporting Company Values

Company values are how organizations define the core pillars of their identity and business principles. They guide how an organization thinks and behaves; they're the bedrock for all business decisions and the foundation of all successful relationships. Core values should be visible in every aspect of company operation; from sales and marketing, to internal reviews, to employee evaluations.

TRADITIONAL EXPORT OF COMPANY VALUES

Most successful companies have well-developed, proven company values. These values are not just window-dressings but are actual values put into practice every day. Exceptional companies, however, have taken the implementation of these values one step further; they have exported those values outside of their company walls to their customers, clients, and communities.

For example, assume a company has, as one of its core values, the concept of *integrity*. Highly successful companies will not only incorporate *integrity* as part of their business practices, but will also strongly encourage it as part of the practices with their vendors, customers, and clients. *Integrity*, as one of their company values, will be prominently displayed as a fundamental principle by everyone who does business with this company.

THE NEW BUSINESS MODEL FOR EXPORTING COMPANY VALUES

In today's activist world, many innovative and growing businesses are avoiding the traditional company values, such as commitment, respect, and excellence, and are opting to include as part of their company values descriptors that follow a more social responsibility bent.

Corporate social responsibility (known as CSRs) initiatives aren't new. In the 1960s, this term referred to corporate philanthropy motivated by a general sense of moral and legal responsibility of a corporation to the world-at-large. The problem with this early CSR initiative was that it separated social responsibility from core business functions. Philanthropic, social, or environmental efforts were not part of the core business practices.

In recent years, however, the original CSR concept has been eclipsed by "social purpose," which was developed to integrate social responsibility with core business functions. In concept, by combining selective social purposes with corporate values, business leaders can leverage the purpose of their business with how they want to impact their communities and society as a whole.

While the quality of product and price are still paramount, it appears customers are increasingly influenced by how and where a product is manufactured, the environmental practices in its manufacture, worker conditions, and the corporate behavior of a company while producing the final product, all of which are represented by "social purpose."

Today, a successful corporate brand now needs to maintain a clean corporate reputation—one that persuades customers that they all share the same values, understanding, and purpose.

While traditional businesses may be thinking they can export values such as integrity and customer care, many activist businesses are now aggressively exporting values such as LGBT rights, gun control, and open immigration. And they are doing so in full respect of the concept of developing and adhering to corporate values that include their own brand of social purpose.

SOURCE OF CORPORATE VALUES

Corporate values originate in four places:

- **First, and most traditionally, they are the brain-child of the business founders. They are the principles used to develop the first business plan and are the values they want to follow as the business moves forward.**
- **Second, many businesses assemble a team of key business thought-leaders and engage them in the task of developing a set of core values. This team, potentially the future leaders of the business, is not to necessarily build consensus but is to create a set of lasting and impactful values for the future.**
- **Third, core values are being imposed by activist and engaged employees. Facebook unintentionally changed its core values when a senior vice president was seen with a**

conservative judge candidate and the employees subsequently revolted. Wayfair changed their core values when employees refused to put beds together for immigrant children because they viewed it as being complicit with immigration policies they did not like.

- Finally, and most recently, many well-known nongovernmental agencies (NGOs) such as Amnesty International, Greenpeace, and the Fair Labor Association, are actively pursuing businesses to adopt their specific set of values. They are influencing corporate decision making in areas such as access to essential medicines, labor standards, environmental protection, and human rights. These organizations—as well as a plethora of other national and local civic associations—now constantly monitor corporate behavior and work to mobilize public opinion for or against specific corporate values.

SOCIAL PURPOSE AS COMPANY VALUES

Social purposes, in any of its significant forms such as; (1) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), (2) Sustainable and Responsible Investing (SRI), (3) Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG), is a rapidly growing trend in the business world. Ice Cream companies to professional sporting teams are getting involved and deciding what core values (that include social purposes) they want to promote.

They are concerned not only for the values as they reflect internal business practices, but how the buying public will see those values as a positive brand for their business. The question that remains is are these core values when combined with social purposes a marketing strategy or a philanthropic attempt to better society.

The specific values promoted by social purposes are limited by only the imagination of the company leadership. Environmental issues, labor policies, and international conflicts are a few of the values adopted by many of the largest corporations today. Furthermore, adopted issues do not have to be limited to select popular topics such as those covered by the national news media. Many businesses have focused on local and even neighborhood concerns.

For business owners considering their core values and any social purposes they may want to add, there are many issues to consider.

- **Does the social purpose truly reflect the business's interest and the employees?**
- **Is the social purpose a fad and an isolated popular topic, or is it a long-term concern?**
- **Is the corporate leadership willing to live daily under the influence of the public who is behind the social purpose?**
- **Does the social purpose really have any long-term chance of success?**

The answer to these questions is the difference between making core values combined with social purpose a marketing strategy, or a company core value.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can you think of a corporation you regularly engage (*buy their product or use their services*) that exports corporate values that are outside the traditional values?

Who is it and what do they export?

2. Do you think corporations should be able to export values that are divisive and controversial?

How might doing business with companies who hold anti-Christian values undermine your company values?

3. What are the risks and rewards of adopting current social causes as values?

How might current issue values become a distraction to your core business?

4. What are some corporate social issues you wish you could export as a corporate value?

What is keeping you from promoting these issues as a corporate value?

EXPORTING CORE VALUES

Most successful businesses go through the process of developing a quality, genuine statement of core company values. For Christian business owners, however, that is only the first step we must take in considering core business values.

Because we are a business owned and/or run by believers in the salvation of Jesus Christ, we have a higher standard to set for our businesses. Our company values are not only to empower our employees and to declare to the outside world what we, as a business, stand for. Our values must be established to be exported to everyone who comes in contact with our product or service, demonstrating the love of Christ. This standard manifests itself in two distinctly different business aspects.

As a Business Principle

First, it's important for Christians to remember why they are in business to begin with. The most important part of owning and operating a company is to glorify God by making our business a good business. And, it is a good business if it is profitable precisely because it is effectively serving the needs of others.

Now, while that is mostly true for many businesses, we as Christians have a particular mandate to operate a good business.

We need to always take our focus away from self-centered, unethical, and short-term tactics for making a profit and apply our Christian beliefs to the way we do business. These beliefs, in a business sense, should focus on sustainability, serving others, and, ultimately, long-term profitability.

The Bible is the source of our business management philosophy, and we, as Christians in businesses should strive to live our faith through work. This means:

- Providing high-quality customer service. (Ephesians 6:7-8)

*"rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, **8** knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free."*

- Being honest and upstanding in every transaction. (Leviticus 19:11)

"You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another."

- Stewarding one's resources effectively. (1 Peter 4:10)

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace

- Producing high-quality goods and services. (Luke 6:38)

“give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

- Treating every single employee with dignity. (1 Peter 2:17-25)

“Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

- Seeking to serve others and create value. (Hebrews 6:10)

“For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.”

Of course, these are things that every business owner should be doing. But since Christians live to serve God and uphold the principles set out by the Bible, we should be particularly intentional about running our businesses well.

As a Change Agent

Secondly, Christian business owners are called to make a difference. Ultimately, that difference must be in the lives of the people we come into contact with. If we choose to accept any of a myriad of social purposes as part of our business values, we need to make sure that those purposes are in adherence to Scripture.

We know for a fact that lives are changed when people come into contact with the power of an All-Mighty, Sovereign God. Lives are changed when business owners realize the company belongs to and is run by the God of the Universe. Lives are changed when our Christian values are not just talked about but lived out in real life daily.

Lives are changed when we don't just show our company values in our products and services, but when they are on display by the owners and employees every hour of every day.

The values we select to be our company values need to be truth values, time tested values that are biblically based. They are the values where people are more likely to have positive life-altering experiences both in the workplace and as a user of our products and services. And only biblical standards can have that effect.

In essence, the Holy Spirit needs to become the silent worker that brings the business owner, workers, and customers in touch with the resurrection power of Jesus—and the use of exporting our company values is one place to start that connection.

Impacting the world starts with the growing faith of Christian business leaders. Imagine if your business became a sanctuary for real-life people who daily are living and working out biblical company values. We can then become real change-agents for Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss whether the following terms are more secular or more Biblical:
Authentic Career Oriented Creative
Family Fun Honesty
Independent Loyalty Perfection
Recognition Security Winning
2. What are some social purposes that Christian businesses can embrace and add to their list of corporate values?

3. Discuss your current company values. In light of this lesson, are there any changes you might consider?

How might your existing or proposed values be leveraged to impact your customers, vendors, and community to reflect your commitment to Christ?
