



Built on Values: Creating an Envable Culture that Outperforms the Competition

Ann Rhoades

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Most leaders know that a winning, engaged culture is the key to attracting top talent—and customers. Yet, it remains elusive *how* exactly to create this ideal workplace—one where everyone from the front lines to the board room knows the company’s values and feels comfortable and empowered to act on them.

Based on Ann Rhoades’ years of experience with JetBlue, Southwest, and other companies known for their trailblazing corporate cultures, *Built on Values* reveals exactly *how* leaders can create winning environments that allow their employees and their companies to thrive. Companies that create or improve values-based cultures can become higher performers, both in customer and employee satisfaction and financial return, as proven by Rhoades’ work with JetBlue, Southwest Airlines, Disney, Loma Linda University Hospitals, Doubletree Hotels, Juniper Networks, and P.F. Chang’s China Bistros.

Built on Values provides a clear blueprint for how to accomplish culture change, showing:

- How to exceed the expectations of employees and customers
- How to develop a Values Blueprint tailored to your organization’s goals and put it into action
- Why it’s essential to hire, fire, and reward people based on values alone, and
- How to establish a discipline for sustaining a values-centric culture

Built on Values helps companies get on the pathway to greatness by showing the exact steps for either curing an ailing company culture or creating a new one from scratch.

Amazon Exclusive: Q&A with Ann Rhoades



Author Ann Rhoades

How do you define a values-based culture? Most companies will tell you that they have a mission statement, or a formal vision statement. To me, the best companies have a fundamental value that they have defined as an anchor for the organization. In the best airlines, for instance, integrity and, of course, safety, are important anchors that really define the organizations. **Knowing that values are important, how as a**

leader do you actually implement them? Like anything else that's worth doing, it's worth planning, so first you assess where you are. Then figure out, do you presently have a culture you want to continue having, or are there issues that you want to change? We believe that you have to blueprint the process and then have an ongoing system for maintaining that culture once you create it. We call it *values blueprinting*. You sit in a room with your best employees (from every level of the organization) and make sure that the values you presently have are correct, that they differentiate your organization, and, frankly, define it as a high-performing organization. Or you determine and define other values you really want to have. But the critical part of the blueprinting is that you also define the *behaviors* that will support those values. That's the piece that most organizations fail to do. When employees hear integrity is a value, they don't know necessarily what it means in terms of their behavior. The Values Blueprint walks you through how you roll it out, how you maintain it, and how you hold people accountable for it; that's how you develop a culture that differentiates itself from others.

What is different about a values-based culture? What would someone notice about an organization that adopts one versus one without it? The great thing about a values-based culture is that it defines everyone's expectations. You can always rely on how you are going to be treated as a customer and what is expected of you as an employee. It comes down to consistency of performance and consistency of behavior. For instance, when I ask people to define Southwest Airlines, they will almost always define it by the behavior of employees. They talk almost invariably about how much fun they have on the Southwest flights versus flights on other airlines. That doesn't just happen, it's planned. Fun is one of the values at Southwest. They not only hire people who are fun, they hold people accountable for having fun, and it is one of the values of the organization and it is consistent.

How do you hire people with the same values, how do you bring people onboard who can do that? Past behavior is predictive of future behavior about 94 percent of the time, so if someone had integrity yesterday, he or she will likely have integrity today. When you know what behaviors you want, you can ask questions of the individual and get examples of his or her past behaviors. If these behaviors match what you have defined as the behaviors you want, then you can actually predict that the individual will be successful in the organization.

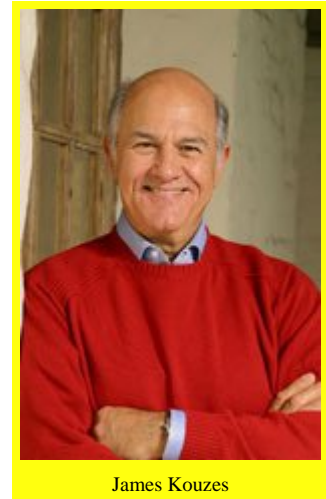
Could you give an example of putting this into practice? When we were starting to build JetBlue, one of the things we looked for were people with high integrity. We interviewed an individual who was a mechanic but had not been employed for three years. And the reason was that ninety days into his first job, he was asked to sign off on an airplane that he did not feel was safe. He knew that if he refused, not only would he be fired from that airline for insubordination, but, in addition, he would not be employable as an airline mechanic in the New York area. He did not sign off on the aircraft and he was fired, and though he applied for many jobs, he was not hired anywhere else. But at JetBlue, we could not wait to hire this young man because he epitomized exactly the behaviors that we wanted to see consistently throughout the organization. He has been very successful with us.

How do you maintain a values-based culture? It's like anything that grows. Just because you develop a great culture doesn't mean that it will remain a great culture. So we believe in a very strong maintenance program. Our model recommends that A-Players in your company form committees charged with maintaining that culture. Because they are top performers, they're enthusiastic, engaged, and willing to hold others accountable. A very systematic process for maintenance of the culture has to occur or you will soon lose that great culture.

What is a leader's role in maintaining a values-based culture? Critical! Employees watch the behaviors of leaders to see if the values are being lived. It's simple: if leaders are not living the values, employees won't either. So part of a leader's reward package has to be based on living the values, not just making the numbers. One last thing: one of the most critical things you can do is to make sure that you create your own culture. It should be culture by design; you shouldn't just let it happen. Very rarely have cultures been successful that have just been allowed to happen, and all of a sudden CEOs will call us and say, "Oh my gosh, I didn't realize this is what we had evolved to." You need to pay attention to the culture of the organization just the way that you pay attention to the financial side. The culture side will eventually be as important as any other side, even in the near view. I will tell you, the Southwests, JetBlues, and Doubletrees, any of the organizations we work with that have great cultures, they all understand this. It is really about, first of all, designing it, and then maintaining it and making certain that you continue to have

the kind of culture that you really want to be proud of.

Expert Review by Jim Kouzes



*Jim Kouzes is the coauthor with Barry Posner of the bestselling book *The Leadership Challenge* and over a dozen other books on leadership, including their most recent, *The Truth About Leadership*.*

The truth is that credibility is the foundation of leadership. This is the inescapable conclusion Barry Posner and I have come to after thirty years of asking people around the world what they look for and admire in a leader, someone whose direction they would willingly follow. It turns out that the believability of the leader determines whether people will willingly give more of their time, talent, energy, experience, intelligence, creativity, and support. And just what is credibility behaviorally? According to our research, it's *doing what you say you will do*, which is exactly what Ann Rhoades squarely addresses in her powerful new book, *Built on Values*.

Built on Values isn't a theoretical book. It's a practical guide to organizational culture creation and the critical role leaders play in driving it. As Ann says, you cannot create culture; you can only create an environment in which a particular culture can thrive. Leaders have to pay as much attention to the culture side of an organization as they do the financial side. You cannot ignore it and assume it will crop up organically. You must show which behaviors will be rewarded and which will not be tolerated; which represent the identity of the organization and differentiate you in the marketplace. And you must hire, fire, and reward based on this criteria, making expectations clear.

Ann points out that leaders drive values by making the commitment to a values-based culture and leading by example. Values drive behaviors by illustrating to employees what acceptable behavior in the company looks like. Behaviors drive culture because the collective behaviors of people in the organization are, by definition, the culture, for good or ill. And, culture drives performance because people who are committed to and understand the values and behaviors will take responsibility for performance.

Built on Values does not preach a particular set of values. That's for you to decide. What Ann does make very clear, however, is that you have to define a set of values that differentiate your organization from all the others out there and then make them a part of the everyday experience of the company. From the front line to the boardroom, everyone has to know the values of the organization and feel empowered to act on them. *Built on Values* is the best book available out there on how to create this kind of an organization. It's solid, practical, and full of great examples to guide you. I highly recommend it to every leader who wants to be the envy of their competition.

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From reader reviews:

Mary Marshall:

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Tracie Berry:

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Jacob Brown:

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