

Don't just talk about values

Why it takes effort to get employees to live the values of your organization

More than a dozen years after the demise of Enron Corp. made the company's name a synonym for corporate greed and scandal, there are still lessons to be learned. The energy company touted integrity as one of its core values along with communication, respect and excellence. These values as well as others were printed in annual reports and hung on the company's office walls. Didn't seem to matter in the end, did it?



ROBERT PASIN

CEO

Radio Flyer Inc. — started in 1917 by Antonio Pasin, whose dream was “to bring joy to every boy and every girl.”

Robert is known in the company as chief wagon officer and earned his MBA from Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University.

(773) 797-9133
cwo@radioflyer.com
www.radioflyer.com

Everyone talks about values, and how important they are to an organization, but if they are just talk, they are rendered meaningless. As a leader, how do you make sure the right values are present and active on a daily basis in your business?

Several years ago, as I started to hire more people into our company and pursue more global growth, it became clear to me that we needed to articulate our values and make sure structured mechanisms were in place in our culture to help us walk the talk. At that time, our values were not written down.

Here's how we did it:

First, we engaged everyone in the company in a yearlong discussion that asked open-ended questions like:

- How do people really act here?
- How do our values show up in our daily work?

Through this discussion, some really positive themes emerged like trust, quality and respect. Next, we had a small group work on drafting the specific words. They came up with the Little Red Rule (our spin on the Golden Rule) that reads: “Every time we touch people's lives, they will feel great about Radio Flyer.”

We get better at what we measure and we become what we celebrate, so take

the time to create your own methods that measure and celebrate how your values show up in your culture.

Here are some great ways that you can make your values really stick — they have worked for us.

- **Hire for values** — Since our people are the culture, we screen for values. No values match equals no hire.
- **Build values evaluation into performance reviews** — In addition to receiving a rating on results, every employee receives a rating and feedback about how they are living our values. It impacts promotions and compensation.
- **Communicate clearly** — We defined the actions required to deliver the Little Red Rule and we call these the FLYER Code. These are printed on our business cards, hang on our walls and we talk about them a lot.
- **Reinforce frequently** — In monthly company meetings, we highlight examples of values in action with the results people produce.
- **Celebrate behaviors that reinforce your values** — We created the Little Red Rule Award, a peer recognition that goes to an employee that does an excellent job demonstrating our values. Prime parking spot, cool trophy, etc. ●



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