1. Topic

The human contributions that are vital to the success of any workplace are volunteered as *gifts*, Gary Hamel cautions, and “can’t be managed.” They may only appear where shared values are in evidence, informed by a common purpose. Tapping into the knowledge, creativity, ideas, energy and power of your employees does not occur because you *command* obedience. Instead, as you connect with your team members, igniting passion around a compelling sense of higher purpose, employees will be driven to give their best to the organization. This is acutely the case for *millennials*, younger employees born between 1980 and 2000, who are less likely to accept top-down driven organizations, having grown up in a networked era. They prize speed, agility, openness and collaboration, and, they expect to have a greater voice in the workplace than was the case for their predecessors (Jim Whitehurst, *The Open Organization*). Global economies and diverse markets, clients, ideas and diverse talent, place a premium on cultures that emphasize integrity and collaboration. Such constructive behaviours are preferred over aggressive ones that emphasize “perfectionism, power, competition, and opposition” (Catalyst, July 7, 2015).

When an employee’s personal values align with organizational values, and when they believe in the organizational mission, they fulfill a higher purpose at work as they live their values every day. Bill George, the former CEO of Medtronic, noted: “Your *True North* is what you believe at the deepest level, what truly defines you - your beliefs, your values, your passions, and the principles you live by.” (Mackey, Sisodia). As a company that is consistently ranked highly by employees as one of the best to work for, delivering impressive financial results, clearly articulated values and cultural norms have taken the organization to higher levels of performance.

High-performing government organizations, private sector and non-profit organizations, understand that no entity can afford to waste human potential in the workplace. People need to know that the organization and its leaders care about them and that their work is advancing a meaningful mission. Leaders are expected to be accessible, to answer questions, admit mistakes, and to apologize when they are wrong or have slipped up. The *authority to lead* has little to do with your position in the hierarchy, access to privileged information, or, with the *economic contract* that gets people through the door each day. It comes from the respect that you *earn by modelling your best values daily* and by being *inclusive*, inviting every employee to serve as a thought leader. As a manager, you deliver on a *moral contract* with your employees, colleagues and clients, one that is values-based, ethical, and enables people to give their best performance, in an environment of continuous improvement. In values-driven organizations, employees are appreciated and actively supported. Your values as a
leader are visible in your daily acts, words and deeds. Ethical leaders make a difference by promoting equality and diversity, soliciting and acting upon feedback, demonstrating personal accountability, setting the tone in the office, and, fostering sound relationships based on mutual trust, commitment, and a shared vision of a 'higher good' and civility. Consistency between what managers commit to doing - and how they behave in action - is the bedrock of organizational progress and well-being. Organizations are only as healthy as the individuals who lead them, according to Barbara Stegemann, who notes, "Your character is your destiny." The same could be said of organizations.

As Andrew McAfee observes, of the MIT Centre for Digital Business, an open organization encourages and fosters initiative and creativity at all levels, and ensures that people adhere to shared values and conduct, rather than running operations based on “HIPPO – the highest-paid person’s opinion” or a separate set of rules reserved for leaders only (Abrahamson et al). The Government of Canada, for example, has a values and ethics code that was created as a “compass to guide public servants in everything they do” on behalf of citizens. These include: respect for democracy; respect for people; integrity; stewardship; and, excellence (TBS).

In a private sector context, a study conducted by Jessica Kennedy of the Wharton School suggests that women are less willing to sacrifice ethical values for money and social status” indicating that “businesses can retain talented women by acting more ethically.” Whom you attract as an organization, no matter what sector you occupy, makes a big difference in determining future success (Albion). As a leader, you are the ‘face of the organization’ for your employees. Your daily conduct is carefully scrutinized and has a huge impact on individuals in your sphere.

2. Assignment

The first question you need to answer as a values-based leader is, “Why are we here?” “For the sake of what are we investing our energies and commitment in this endeavour?” Once you answer these essential questions, you begin to define your leadership purpose. Your values define who you are and what you stand for in this world. Ask yourself:

a) When I walk in the office door in the morning, do my employees know where I am preparing to lead them? Do they have clarity around my values and what matters most to me and to all of us?
b) What are your top six values?
c) What does success look like for you?
d) Is it driven by external or internal validation?
e) What is your leadership purpose?
f) What qualities do you project as a leader? Are you authentic?
g) Are you the same person at work as you are at home and in social settings?
h) Are you guided by your values?
i) Are you consistent in what you say and do?
As a leader, you enable your team members to achieve their own potential and to advance organizational business objectives. The way in which you do so is not only integral to your happiness, and effectiveness, but it determines the success and contribution level of your respective team members. Accordingly, they may choose to bring their own passion, purpose, commitment, and gifts to your aid, as part of a higher calling, where they act as public-spirited leaders volunteering transcendent ideas, or, they may choose to restrict their contributions to that which is strictly necessary. Leadership comes from the inside out (Kouzes, Posner). It is, as some have said, an “inside job.”

3. Video Descriptions and Instructions

Being a responsible leader means that you are “response-able,” that is, you have the ability to respond to the needs of others and to set the leadership standard high through your own example and expectations. In a recent study examining the top leadership competencies required to become an effective leader, leaders around the world rated most highly the following attributes, “high ethical and moral standards” and “communicating clear expectations.” These attributes speak to the importance of creating a safe and trusting environment so that employees can excel (Harvard Business Review, March 15, 2016).

As anyone knows who has ever read about Rosa Parks, Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Ghandi or Mother Teresa, values are personal. When your values inspire your actions to advance a higher interest or good, the more likely you are to be a leader who inspires others. As you explore your inner leadership territory and values, checking to see if you have any cognitive blind spots, you will be seeking to apply your values in the service of a better society. Socrates is reported to have said, in 399 AD, “The unexamined life is not worth living” (Stegemann).

Your inner exploration starts with two videos. The first video, entitled, “Voicing Values in the Workplace,” features an interview with Dr. Mary Gentile, the Director of the Business Curriculum at Babson College, sponsored by McKinsey (2010). The video is slightly more than 8 minutes in length and it discusses how to promote values in your organization, especially when delicate situations arise and there are apparent or real conflicts of interest. Gentile discusses self-imposed barriers to speaking truth to power in the workplace and proposes ways in which to frame values daily as part of your work. She proposes asking constructive questions of leaders to make risks visible before decisions are made that could trigger negative consequences or violate rules of ethical conduct. She stresses the importance of sharing out loud with your employees your thought processes around values-based decision-making. Refer to the video here: http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/voicing-values-in-the-workplace

The second video is one that is entitled, “The Career Jungle Gym and Finding Your Passion,” and it is an interview sponsored by Fortune during a business conference involving powerful
business women (October, 17, 2013). It is slightly more than 16 minutes long. The first woman interviewed is Sallie Krawcheck, a CEO who ran Billion dollar financial investment and wealth management companies and encountered significant values challenges that tested her leadership. The second woman featured in the video is Patty Stonesifer, who was the most senior woman at Microsoft, who ran the Gates Foundation, launched networks such as MSNBC, serves on the President’s White House Council to alleviate poverty, and now runs a charitable organization called Martha’s Table in Washington, D.C. Both women leaders discuss their personal values, lessons learned, and passions, including times when they were expected to ‘sit down and shut up’ but chose to do the right thing for the long-term, listening to their ‘gut’ and intuition, when pressed to the wall. Stonesifer speaks to the values that are her bedrock foundation and to which she returns time and time again: increasing knowledge and promoting social justice. Krawcheck urges women leaders to reflect upon what matters and how to make a difference in the workplace as an exemplary leader. Good managers become great leaders, it is clear, when they exemplify the values that they espouse. The link for this video is as follows: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5UflM4d14

4. Follow-Up Activities and Application

After viewing these two videos, reflect upon the following questions:

a) What belief systems or assumptions about the world operate in my organization?

b) What is or is not accepted in the organizational culture?

c) How do we address conflicts and real or perceived conflicts of interest or unethical conduct?

d) How am I exercising my personal power and influence in the organization?

e) Going back to your top 6 values, do your values align with those of your organization?

f) How do you specifically transmit your values and commitments to others?

g) How do you make trade-offs among stakeholders who are impacted differently by a decision?

h) What values are you applying? Are you consistent in their application?

i) How do you deal with the role of values in tough times?

j) Do you allow people to learn from ‘failures’ and stand behind them or do you engage in blaming others and distancing yourself from those responsible?

k) What are you rewarding in terms of behaviours and values in your environment? Do you reward intellectual curiosity and an open mindset?

l) Do you welcome diversity of thoughts, abilities, and backgrounds? Or are your personal biases operating as your Achilles’ heel?

m) How can you influence and create a better culture in your organization and in your area of influence?

n) Is your organization aligning values with its business strategy or are they distinct from one another? Does your organizational code of values exist only on paper?

o) Does your organization measure the Return on Values or ROV? Do you treat employees fairly so that they wish to remain in your organization?

p) Does your organizational and personal reputation for cultivating good relationships create value for the organization, or does it bring the organization and your team into disrepute?
q) Will the next employee survey provide good feedback on your values-based direction as a leader?

r) Will your performance pay at year end reflect your values-based decision-making?

As Sallie Krawcheck observes, the true test of a leader and of a decent human being is that they continue to keep learning from their mistakes and continuously change, incorporating new information and evolving, as their values are expressed on a daily basis. As human beings, we are uniquely endowed in our ability to grow and to apply reason and ‘heart’ to our decisions.

Patty Stonesifer wisely says that if leaders “want to go fast, go alone. But, if you want to go far, go together.” She encourages taking into account diverse viewpoints and multiple angles in order to produce a values-based culture that is transparent to employees and clients. Dr. Gentile advocates exploring your personal values as a “self-defense class for your soul.”

5. Expert Knowledge

Dawn Nicholson-O’Brien is the President and CEO of Celtic Oracle, an executive services consulting firm. A former executive in the Government of Canada, Dawn served in executive level roles during three and a half decades. She also served as the Vice President of the Institute on Governance, has developed and delivered advanced leadership programs for executives, and, she is the recipient of numerous leadership awards. Dawn is a sought after speaker and author (see www.celticoracle.ca)

6. Key Words

Key words include: leadership purpose; integrity; values compass; networked era; millennials; True North; moral contract; modelling values; ethical behaviours; character; openness; what you stand for; face of the organization; inner leadership journey and territory; bedrock foundation; belief systems and assumptions; personal power and influence; values alignment; Return on Values (ROV); values-based decision-making; self-defense class for the soul; public-spirited leaders.

7. Additional Resources and Reading

Curated Video Titles

- CNN. “Study: In business, women value ethics more than men,” www.cnn.com/2013/05/15/business/women-work-ethics/
- Gary Hamel, Foreword to the book written by Jim Whitehurst, The Open Organization: Igniting Passion And Performance, see below.
- Barbara Stegemann, The 7 Virtues of a Philosopher Queen: A woman’s guide to living and leading in an illogical world, The 7 Virtues Communications Group, Bedford, Nova Scotia, 2008.

Submitted by: Dawn Nicholson-O'Brien
President and CEO, Celtic Oracle
613-592-7708
dnicholsonobrien@rogers.com