Questions to discover your organizational or personal values

If you're working on discovering your own values or those of your organization, you're in for a fun exercise. Here we provide a list of thought-provoking questions you can use to get started.

These questions are intended to help you get past common "pay to play" values like integrity, honesty, or trust - things that most people and organizations would value. We want to encourage you to dig deeper and find your unique values.

Use any number of the following questions to spark inspiration on what you or your company value.

01   ## Reflecting on the past to plan for the future

- If you found out you only had 30 seconds to live and you can re-live a handful of special moments from your past, what would they be and what makes them so meaningful to you?

- Looking back at the moments where you were most proud of the work you or your team did, why exactly do you feel that way? On the flip side, what makes you most frustrated or angry?

- Think of an important decision you had to make that ultimately didn't sit well in your mind. What's the source of that dissonance and what could you have changed that would clear things up?

- When you were young, what did you love doing and why? Do you still do these things and if not, why? What are your passions now and why are you drawn to them?

- Looking back at when you've overcome really difficult situations in your life, what got you through those times? What themes arise when you think about times when you've grown the most emotionally?

02 Drawing inspiration from others

– When you think about other organizations or leaders you truly admire, what is it that makes you feel that way? Alternatively, think about a person or organization you dislike. What is it about them that makes you feel that way?

– Thinking back to previous companies you've worked for, what did you love about how they operated? How would you describe their leaders and reasons for making big decisions? Conversely, what has frustrated you or made you want to leave a company?

– Think of five people you respect immensely. How would you describe each person using just one word or phrase? Now do the same thing for five people you disdain or don't trust.

03 The ideal workplace

– When you're excited about something outside of work that gives you energy and enthusiasm, what is it about that activity that makes you feel so passionate? How does that relate to what you believe you value?

– If a friend asked you to describe how decisions are made at work, how priorities are set, and what the "mindset" of the organization is, what would you say?

– Imagine your company grows very quickly and vastly exceeds your financial goals, rewarding all stakeholders as an outcome in just a handful of years. What else would you want to be able to say you accomplished in growing the organization beyond monetary success?

Honing in on what's important

Once you have a list of initial values statements or actions that feel right, hone them down using a few prioritization questions such as:

- Can you prioritize which of the values are most important to you or rank them? What's the difference between those at the top of the list and those at the bottom? Eliminate any that don't feel right for you. Avoid the temptation of producing values that you think other people will admire if those values don't truly resonate with you.

- Do you value X even over Y? For example, Do you value shipping innovative features quickly even over building new products without bugs?

- Are you willing to make significant sacrifices (e.g., time, money, relationships) to uphold this value?

- Is this value something you can expect your most devoted coworkers to live by, even when it involves some level of sacrifice?

- What are examples of behaviors that would exemplify each value within your organization? What types of behaviors would violate the values and how do those behaviors impact how you grow the company?

- How would you evaluate or measure if someone was upholding these values or not?

- Similar to the previous question, if you were to reward employees for living these values, how would you identify the appropriate behaviors?

We hope you find the questions and prioritization exercises above useful in helping you discover what's most meaningful to you and your company.