Values on the Go

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# Values on the Go

## Topical Index

### Background
- 01 Remarkable Service Infrastructure – 1
- 02 Remarkable Service Infrastructure – 2
- 03 Leadership Development
- 04 Service-Based Leadership
- 05 Employee Empowerment

### Well-Defined Values and Culture of Service
- 06 Creating an Organizational Culture
- 07 Values and Culture
- 08 Continual Reinforcement

### Mission and Vision
- 09 Mission
- 10 Vision

### Guiding Principles
- 11 Proactive Leadership
- 12 Professional Expertise
- 13 Proven Operating Systems
- 14 Sound Planning and Implementation
- 15 Innovative Programs
- 16 Detailed Benchmarks
- 17 Formal, Ongoing Training

### Operating Standards
- 18 Vision and Goals Articulated
- 19 Uncompromising Commitment
- 20 Authority Assigned, Accountability Assured
- 21 Rejecting the Status Quo
- 22 Standards Defined, Continual Improvement
- 23 Member Issues Resolved
- 24 Constant Communication and Feedback
- 25 Benchmarking
- 26 Clean, Safe, Well-Maintained Facilities
- 27 Ultimate Value of People

### Managers’ Code of Ethics
- 28 My Actions and Behavior Reflect
- 29 Organizing Work Areas and Training Thoroughly
- 30 Protecting Assets and Resources
- 31 Leadership and Example Set the Standard
- 32 Accepting Personal Favors
- 33 Employees’ Productive Effort
- 34 Requesting Personal Services
- 35 Personal Relationships with Employees
- 36 Maintaining Distance from Employees
- 37 My Integrity

### Principles of Employee Relations
- 38 Treating Employees with Dignity and Respect
- 39 Apply Rules and Regulations Fairly
- 40 Every Employee is Important
- 41 Employee Failures are Management Failures
- 42 Communication and Feedback
- 43 Informed Employees are Better Employees
- 44 Employee Recognition
- 45 Responsibility to Fellow Employees
- 46 Empowering Employees
- 47 Pleasant Workplace

### Management Professionalism
- 48 Consistency in Personnel Actions
- 49 No Retaliation
- 50 No Sexual Harassment
- 51 No Discriminatory Practices
- 52 No Favoritism
- 53 No Fraternization with Employees
- 54 No Fraternization with Members
- 55 No Waste, Fraud, or Abuse
- 56 No Disclosing Confidential Information
- 57 No Complaining to Employees
- 58 No Favors from Vendors

### Additional Resources
Values on the Go

#01

**Remarkable Service Infrastructure – 1**

Just as a hospitality operation must have the appropriate amenities of a requisite quality – facilities that are conceived, designed, constructed, and paid for – so must there be proper preparation for the enterprise’s staff to deliver quality service. In many ways the ‘soft’ infrastructure is more challenging to build than its bricks and mortar counterpart. This is so because of one reason – the difficulties in getting a diverse group of people to work toward a common purpose of fulfilling the needs and desires of others. The proof of the difficulty involved is the near-universal recognition of just how rare it is.

Yet high levels of quality service can be achieved. Every year we read about those few companies that have cracked the code and figured out how, not only to satisfy their customers, but to “wow” them with Remarkable Service. And just as in building a dramatic hotel, resort, or restaurant, the construction of the Remarkable Service Infrastructure requires a design based on a thorough understanding of the organizational systems and management disciplines necessary to deliver quality. The diagram below depicts these.

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**Take Away:** The Remarkable Service Infrastructure presents an overarching plan to achieve remarkable service levels in a hospitality operation.
Creating an Organizational Culture

What exactly do we mean by a club culture? The dictionary defines “culture” as the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another. With a slight modification of this definition we come up with the following working definition of organizational culture.

The sum total ways of working and interacting built up by a group of people within an organization and transmitted from one generation of employees to another.

The major benefit of establishing an organizational culture is that once adopted by the majority of people in an organization the culture takes on a life of its own and permeates the workplace. As normal turnover takes place, new hires quickly learn that to be accepted in their new surroundings, they must embrace the culture and make it their own.

In the absence of a culture developed and disseminated by the organization’s leadership, a culture will arise on its own, usually fostered by a vocal few and often cynical and at odds with the purpose of the organization.

So how do you create a culture in your organization? First, you have to define clearly and succinctly the aims of your organization and what it aspires to be. These are most often found in Mission and Vision Statements. Beyond these basic statements of intent, one must clearly spell out standards of behavior and performance or any other formal statements describing the “What, How’s, and Why’s” of conducting the club’s business.

Yet publishing such principles and statements, no matter how inspirational and well-written, will only foster employee cynicism if the values are not enthusiastically embraced by the organization’s leadership. On the other hand, when leadership demonstrates their commitment to the organization’s values by their daily example, employees will do likewise.

The breakthrough is reached when the organization achieves a critical mass of employee buy-in. Though the process of establishing an organizational culture requires patience and persistence as well as leadership and example, when breakthrough is achieved, the culture takes over and is self-sustaining – with the employees holding the bar high and policing their own ranks.

In such an organization, employees understand what must be done and how. Motivation and morale are sky-high as employees are empowered by their participation and contribution. The leader, relieved of the burden of constantly following behind employees to ensure they are doing the right things, can focus on strategic issues and the future of the organization.

The importance of a well-defined and promoted organizational culture cannot be overemphasized or underestimated in its impact on quality, performance, and customer service. The only thing that can screw it up is for the leader to fail to show an ongoing interest or set an uncompromising example of the organizational culture and its values.

Take Away: The values by which a club conducts its business and interacts with members and employees alike must be spelled out in detail and constantly and consistently reinforced.

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A vision statement briefly explains how an organization will achieve its mission.

Here’s a sample club vision statement:

**VISION**

*How we expect to do it!*

Through innovative programming, member-focused service, and principled service-based leadership, our club is dedicated to enhancing the value of club membership through the creation of high quality facilities, services, and programming.

*Our members have invested their time and money in our club and our service to them is to operate the club so as to add value to their lives and provide a refuge of camaraderie and conviviality from the busy world. In so doing, we aim to distinguish ourselves as the best club in the greater metropolitan area.*

**Suggested Discussion Topics or Questions**

**What is a Vision Statement?** *A Vision Statement is a short and clear explanation of how an organization will achieve its stated Mission.*

**Why should employees know this?** *Employees should understand the Big Picture of what their organization is trying to achieve and how they will do it.*

**What are some of the ways our club distinguishes itself from other clubs in the area?**

- Well-defined values
- Continually reinforced culture of service
- Service-based leadership
- Written Standards, Policies, and Procedures
- Proven Operating Systems
- Robust Activities Programming
- Others?

**Take Away:** *A Vision Statement provides a succinct, easy-to-remember explanation of the how the club will achieve its mission.*
Detailed Benchmarks

Guiding Principle: Detailed benchmarks, constantly analyzed

The club benchmarks all areas of the operation and analyzes them for better performance and best practices.

Benchmarks measure operational performance. Over time, these become the operating standards for the club. Club Resources International has identified key operating statistics for all operating departments and established spreadsheets to track benchmarks on a monthly, year-to-date, and year-to-year basis.

Department heads are responsible for benchmarking their operations and for providing completed benchmarking spreadsheets to the controller on a monthly basis. The controller is responsible for completing the monthly Executive Metrics Report. The general manager has overall responsibility to ensure all departments benchmark in detail.

Benchmarked operations allow managers to better understand the rhythms and flow of their business and enable them to intervene in a timely manner when performance is not meeting expectations.

Benchmarking is an important tool for operating more efficiently and improving performance.

Suggested Discussion Topics or Questions

What is a benchmark? It is a standard measurement of operating performance determined over time by tracking key operating statistics.

What should be benchmarked? A wide variety of things can be benchmarks – operating statements, revenues, cost of goods, payroll, expenses, and work processes. The knowledge gained by benchmarking provides an invaluable understanding of a department’s performance.

Who is responsible for benchmarking? Every department head and the club controller, but ultimately, the general manager.

Why should benchmarks be analyzed constantly? Every business has ebbs and flows. Business levels can vary by hour, day, day of week, month, and seasonally. Business levels dictate staffing schedules and inventories. Out of line benchmarks may indicate a serious problem or help identify a best practice to be implemented elsewhere. Paying attention to benchmarks will enhance your bottom line, particularly when monitored constantly.

Take Away: Benchmarks will tell a manager far more about his operation than the summary information found in the monthly financial statements.
Operating Standard: Leaders are uncompromising in their commitment to excellence, quality, and service.

To serve the highest echelons of the community, club leaders have to set and commit to the highest standards.

All of our values, our culture of service, our goals to accomplish, our desire to provide remarkable service are just words on paper unless leaders are committed to their accomplishment. Without the “will to make it happen” and discipline and persistence of leaders at all levels of the organization, the club will never achieve excellence. Jim Collins summed it up perfectly in his book, Good to Great:

“Sustainable transformation follows a predictable pattern of buildup and breakthrough. Like pushing on a giant, heavy flywheel, it takes a lot of effort to get the thing moving at all, but with persistent pushing in a consistent direction over a long period of time, the flywheel builds momentum, eventually hitting a point of breakthrough.

When [employees] see the monolithic unity of the executive team behind the simple plan and the selfless, dedicated qualities of Level 5 leadership, they’ll drop their cynicism. When people begin to feel the magic of momentum – when they begin to see tangible results, when they can feel the flywheel beginning to build speed – that’s when the bulk of people line up to throw their shoulders against the wheel and push.”

When it comes to commitment to excellence, quality, and service, lip service doesn’t cut it. Leaders must “walk the walk” every day.

Suggested Discussion Topics or Questions

Why is our commitment to excellence, quality, and service so important? Ultimately, it’s the only thing the club provides and as individuals who have chosen a career in club management, we take pride in our ability to provide such service to our members. Since we serve the high end of the community, our standards and performance must match the expectations of the members we serve.

Why is remarkable service so challenging? Because it requires managers to establish both the organization and disciplines of the Quality Service Infrastructure and we have to live the commitment by reinforcing it continually in all our dealings with employees. To do this, we must ensure that we have a complete understanding of our values and culture of service.

Why do we talk about Jim Collins’ Flywheel? Because success in our industry is only achieved by a continual and consistent “pushing” in the direction of quality to eventually achieve our “breakthrough.”

How can I ensure that I “persistently push in a consistent direction over a long period of time?” By wholeheartedly supporting our values and culture and using every opportunity to reinforce the message of excellence with employees. I can also foster this attitude of quality and service by setting an unimpeachable example for my employees in all my words and actions.

Take Away: Why do what we do as club managers unless we’re committed to being the best?
Values on the Go

#21

Rejecting the Status Quo

**Operating Standard:** Leaders embrace innovation, initiative, and change while rejecting the status quo.

*Leaders seek continual improvement in all aspects of their operations.*

We frequently hear members say, “What have you done for me lately?” The message behind this statement is “keep my club fresh, interesting, and sometimes surprise me with the unexpected service touch.”

Everything in life changes and the pace of change in today’s technologically driven world is breathtaking. Technologies that amazed us last year are now outdated. The expectations created by this pace of change cause successful businesses and operations to reject the status quo and constantly be on the look out for new and interesting ways to satisfy customers. Given that club members are a “captive audience,” it is even more imperative that we seek new ways to serve and entertain them.

One of the major criticisms we hear about clubs is that they are “old and stodgy,” meaning that they are tradition bound and do things the same old way. While traditions are an important part of club life, one of our traditions should be innovation and creativity – particularly when providing programming and service.

**Suggested Discussion Topics or Questions**

**What are some of the reasons our members expect new and interesting things from their club?**

- Members are used to the fast pace of business and technology innovation
- They see innovation in other restaurants, health clubs, and businesses they patronize
- They want the latest and greatest gadgets and electronics; this desire for new things spills over to their club
- They see some new thing their friends have and they want them too
- They rightly have high expectations from their private club
- They want to be proud of the club they have joined and pay monthly dues to belong
- Others?

**There is always a better way to do things?** With sufficient time and focus, you can always improve your operations or activities. Someone once said that “if you can make something faster, lighter, or cheaper” than anybody else, you’ll become a rich man. We would paraphrase that to, “if you can make something more interesting, creative, and entertaining,” you’ll always delight your members.

**When someone says, “We’ve always done it that way,” what do they mean?** Usually they mean that they are too lazy, disorganized, or just going through the motions of their job to be bothered with trying to continually improve their operation.

**Take Away:** Leaders can never rest on their laurels. They must continually work to improve all aspects of their operations and not accept things as they are – the status quo.

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Managers’ Code of Ethics: As a representative of the club for whom I work, I understand that my actions and behavior, both at and away from work, reflect on the organization that provides my employment. I will, therefore, do everything in my power to represent them faithfully and professionally in all my dealings with members, guests, employees, vendors, and the community at large.

The reputation of our club is dependent upon many things, but nothing is as important as the manner in which employees, particularly managers, conduct themselves at and away from work. In the end, it is our professional behavior that demonstrates pride in the place we work and ourselves. Whoever in the community we come in contact with, our professional demeanor reflects on our place of employment.

Particularly important is how we treat applicants for employment and vendors in the community. If we don’t show common courtesy to people applying for work with us, regardless of whether we hire them or not, we will soon develop a reputation for being an uncaring place to work. Likewise, if we don’t pay our vendors on time and show them common courtesy, we will quickly damage our professional reputation in the community.

Suggested Discussion Topics or Questions

Ask if anyone can give an example of witnessing unprofessional behavior or dress or hearing an employee complain about their place of employment, and how they reacted to it.

What are some ways that a club can demonstrate its professionalism?

- Being a good citizen of the community in which we operate; not just the club but each of its employees as well
- Treating all applicants with courtesy and respect; acknowledging all applications; notifying applicants of non-selection as well as selection.
- Keeping appointments
- Returning phone calls and voice mail messages promptly
- Being respectful of other people’s time, including vendors
- Being kind and courteous with whomever we come in contact; in effect we are always salespeople representing our employer.

Take Away: Leaders represent their place of business and employer in all they do and their actions and behavior must represent both in a professional manner.
Principles of Employee Relations: All employees will be treated with dignity and respect. We will not tolerate discrimination or harassment in any form, or any conduct that is unseemly, unprofessional, or reflects poorly on the club.

The people who directly serve our members in what is a challenging profession must be valued by their leaders at all times. If an employee has a bad attitude, does not meet our work requirements, or does not advance the mission of the club, he must be discharged. All other employees must be given the necessary support by their leaders to do the best job possible.

Suggested Discussion Topics or Questions

List why mistreated employees will not serve you or the interests of the club.

- If you are not loyal to your employees, they will not be loyal to you
- If you do not respect your employees, they will respond in kind
- If you don’t care about your employees, they won’t care about you or what you are trying to achieve
- If you don’t look out for their interests, they won’t look out for yours
- If you don’t treat your employees with respect, they will not treat you or your members with respect
- If you are abusive to employees, the good ones will leave; only the poor ones will stay
- Providing high levels of service is all about attitude; being abusive to employees will foster bad attitudes
- Others?

Take Away: The manner in which leaders view and treat their followers will have a great deal to do with how they perform and, ultimately, with the leaders’ success.
No Discriminatory Practices

Management Professionalism: Biases, prejudice, disparaging remarks or jokes on the basis of race, creed, religion, gender, national origin, ethnic group, age, handicap, or sexual orientation cannot be tolerated. There is no place for bigotry or personal and cultural insensitivity in the workplace. While each person has his or her own biases and prejudices, do not let them interfere with your conduct and decisions as a leader.

Such behavior deems people. It deems those who do it and those who are subjected to it. Since the club is the sum of its parts, words or actions that attack the self esteem of any employee damage our efforts as a whole.

No employee should be subjected to a hostile work environment or demeaned in any way. Such action damages the self-esteem of the individuals who make up your work team. Why would you or anyone want their contribution to the group effort to be impeded in any way?

Further, as a leader you have a responsibility to ensure that no employee is being demeaned by other employees in your department. Unless you step in to stop this, you are abetting the actions and by your own neglect creating a hostile work environment.

Suggested Discussion Topics or Questions

How does discrimination or the perception of discrimination damage your work team?

- It deems some team members
- It causes fractures in your team, making it difficult for people to trust one another and work well together
- It diverts your team’s focus and attention from the task at hand to other issues
- It attacks the self-confidence of some team members
- It creates dissension
- Others?

Take Away: The capabilities of your work team, section, or organization is the sum of its parts. Damaging, denigrating, or limiting the capabilities and contribution of any employee, damages the club as a whole.
Values on the Go

Additional Resources

There are a number of foundational elements necessary for quality and service in the club industry, particularly Leadership, Values, Organization, and Training. To further assist you in your quest for quality and service we offer additional resources available on the Club Resources International website:

Leadership on the Go – 54 topics that can be used for discussions at staff meetings, as reading for managers, or to explain the organization’s leadership style to newly hired managers and supervisors. The perfect tool for teaching a consistent, service-based style of leadership.

Management Disciplines on the Go – 130 management discipline topics in a spiral-bound book that can be used for training/discussion with your hospitality management team. An excellent tool for reminding managers and supervisors of those critical disciplines to operate your establishment more efficiently and profitably. Formatted for brief reading assignments and discussions.

Employee Development and Discipline on the Go – Another of the On the Go Training series, this 65 topic, wire-bound book is directed at the necessary disciplines to find, hire, develop, and retain the best talent for your operation. Includes detailed principles and procedures for counseling, disciplining, and discharging problem employees.

Food Service Management on the Go – Another On the Go Training tool in a spiral-bound book containing 136 best practice topics to remind and reinforce the necessary disciplines in running a high-quality and high-performing food service operation. In addition to well-known practices, this collection contains a number of innovative ideas to improve and transform the most challenging part of your hospitality operation.

Service on the Go – The 54 topics in the Service on the Go book cover such topics as The Foundation of Service, Principles of Service, Attitude, Basic Service Issues, Teamwork, Etiquette, Common Courtesies, Appropriate and Inappropriate Language and Phrases, Body Language and Tone of Voice, The Challenges of Food Service, The Pre-Shift Meeting, Suggestive Selling, Engaging Customers, Dining Service Tips, Service Recovery, Wow Factors, and more. Taken together they form an incredibly effective tool for training new employees and reminding long term employees of the basics of service and service delivery.

The Power of Employee Empowerment – This 27-page wire-bound guidebook explains the concept of employee empowerment and what it takes to achieve it. A great training tool for managers at all levels and a perfect complement to Service-Based Leadership training.

Leadership on the Line, A Guide for Front Line Supervisors, Business Owners, and Emerging Leaders and Leadership on the Line – The Workbook – These two classic books that describe Service-Based Leadership are written specifically for the hospitality industry and are the perfect tool to bring your management group to a common understanding and application of leadership.

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About the Author

Ed Rehkopf is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy and received a Masters of Professional Studies degree in Hospitality Management from Cornell's School of Hotel Administration. During his long and varied career, he has managed two historic, university-owned hotels, managed at a four-star desert resort, directed operations for a regional hotel chain, opened two golf and country clubs, worked in golf course development, and launched a portal web site for the club industry.
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