



Looking Back While Moving Forward

It's the beginning of a new year. Rather than look forward, perhaps it's even more vital to look back, at least for a few moments of reflection. Look back, not at past accomplishments, but on your personal as well as organizational values. What are they? Do they have meaning? How do you know them when you see them?

A lot of the time I spend with clients is focused on organizational values and what they mean for the organization. A scan across a lot of organizations I work with tells me that their value statements aren't remarkably different from each other. Companies tend to maintain similar values. It's not uncommon for companies to value integrity, truth, the customer, the team, trustworthiness, and loyalty. I've seen other values but these are some of the common themes shared by a lot of organizations I've encountered over the years.

I'm not implying that because they share similar values, the values themselves are meaningless. What I have seen is companies that are successful are ones that associate their values to action, and then communicate those actions to their members in a meaningful way.

Looking back on your values, ask yourself: *How do we live our values? What does "integrity" look like? How do I know it when I see it?*

I often tell leaders with whom I work, "Forget about attitude, focus on behavior." What I mean is that unless leaders communicate what a value looks like, it's difficult for people to reach a common understanding of it. Take a value like "integrity," for example. How many people, if asked if they thought integrity was important, would respond with, *"No, integrity is not important; I have no integrity?"* Not many. Yet, every day, organizations find their members committing breaches of *integrity*.

Leaders have a dual responsibility when it comes to values. The first is to be a living example of the values of the organization. The second, perhaps most important responsibility is to teach people what their values look like. Ask yourself if your organization's values are merely theoretical, or can they be demonstrated? Spend some time looking back at your values and how they come to life, and then

communicate them as often as you possibly can. Look for examples of members of your organization who demonstrate those values and make those examples known.

It sometimes helps to look back as we move forward.