

Codifying your Culture.

The What, Why and How of Values

Most organisations say they have values, but they don't. They have words on posters, or wallpaper.

If they had values and used them, people would be happier. Work would be done better. Businesses would move faster.

But they don't. Here's how you can change that.

**What good
values are**

[val·ues] | mass noun

Principles that are intrinsically valuable or desired.

Principles of decision making and behaviour prioritised over others.

Good values are...

1. TRUE

If not, they're a lie and people won't believe them.

2. DEFINED

With clear behaviours for each, so people know how to live them.

3. STRETCHING

So they make you better every day.

4. EASY TO SAY

So you can use them in conversation to make decisions.

5. COUNTED ON ONE HAND

If you can't remember them, how can you use them?

Your organisation already has them

Values are the framework for 'the way we do things here'. How people behave. Your culture.

When defining your values, you're building the framework of your culture.

Then you can understand whether what you have will create the business you want. Something Uber's investors might have spotted if they'd paid attention.

Once you understand your values, you can use them to shape your culture.



The value of values

The value of values



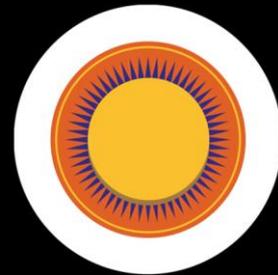
SPEED



ENGAGEMENT



TALENT



BRAND



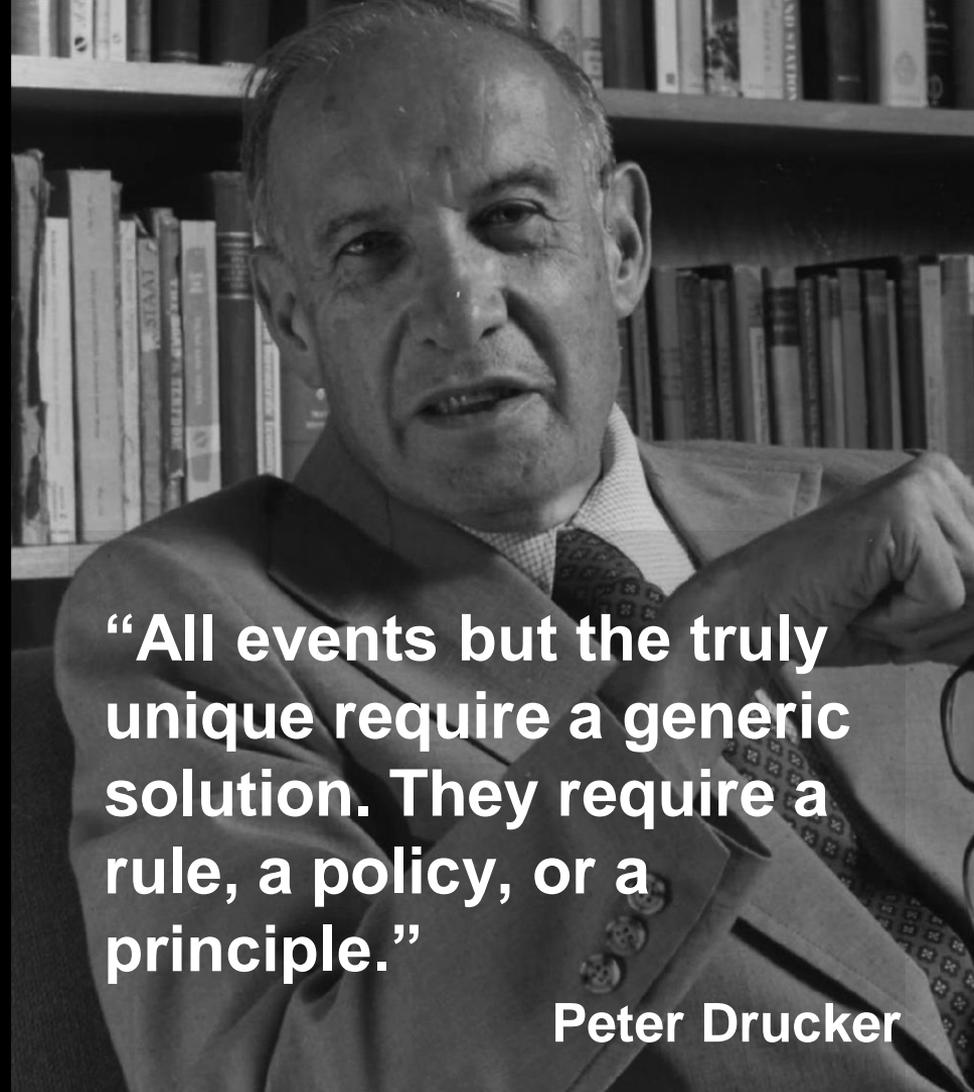
Speed

Sandberg, Zuckerberg, Benioff, Bezos, Huffington, Hoffman and Musk all talk about the value of speed in business.

Moving forward means deciding what to do. People can only make faster decisions if they know what matters to the business when they make them.

Values make it clear what's important in decision making.

Less time spent talking about what to do. More time spent doing it.



“All events but the truly unique require a generic solution. They require a rule, a policy, or a principle.”

Peter Drucker

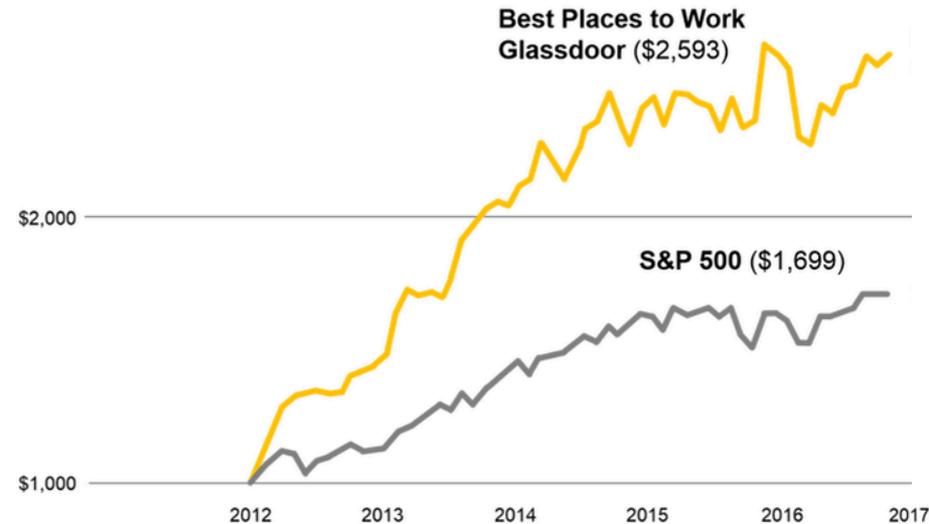


Engagement

97% of the Best Places to Work have values statements. They put their values at the heart of everything they do.

These businesses have the most engaged employees. Which means they care about the quality of their work, the people they work with and the business they're working for.

Stock price, based on a \$1,000 investment



Source: Jacob Morgan, HBR



Talent

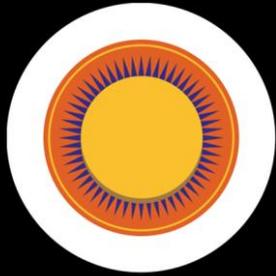
There are two ways to manage. Policies and procedures, or principles. Reed Hastings, founder of Pure Software and Netflix, knows both well.

Netflix is famed for its principles approach to management. Their expenses policy is 'act in the best interests of Netflix'. That's it.

Pure Software was all policies and procedures. As Reed said, this didn't work out well from a talent perspective.

“At Pure...what we failed to understand is by dummy-proofing all the systems, we would have a system where only dummies wanted to work there, which was exactly what happened.”

Reed Hastings, Netflix founder



Brand

Byron Sharp is one of the world's leading marketing academics.

He says brands grow through mental and physical availability. Mental availability depends on the quality and quantity of memory structures related to the brand.

The more consistent you are, the more memorable you are. Consistent action comes from decisions made with consistent principles, or values.

OXFORD

how brands grow

what marketers don't know

Byron Sharp

How to define values

One fable, four simple steps



One fable, four simple steps

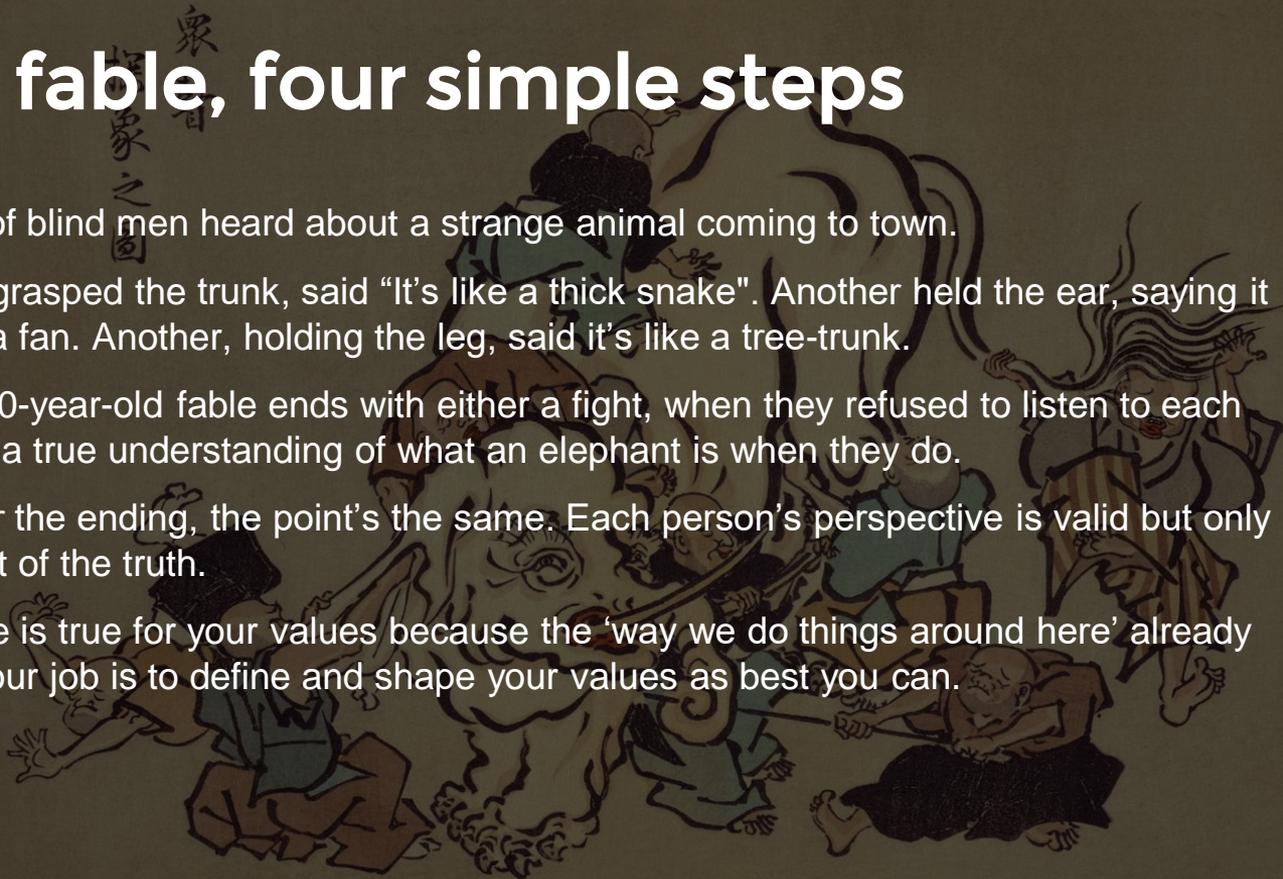
A group of blind men heard about a strange animal coming to town.

The first grasped the trunk, said "It's like a thick snake". Another held the ear, saying it was like a fan. Another, holding the leg, said it's like a tree-trunk.

This 3,000-year-old fable ends with either a fight, when they refused to listen to each other. Or a true understanding of what an elephant is when they do.

Whatever the ending, the point's the same. Each person's perspective is valid but only holds part of the truth.

The same is true for your values because the 'way we do things around here' already exists. Your job is to define and shape your values as best you can.



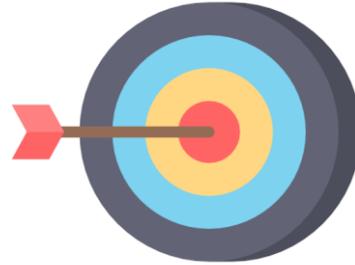
Four simple steps



1. LISTEN



2. DISTIL



3. DEFINE



4. REFINE



1. Listen

Listen to the voices from every corner of your organisation, not just the team at the top.

If you're a small company, run a few workshops.

If you're a big company, it's a bigger job. Run a lot of workshops or do a survey. Whatever you choose, you need qualitative insights first, then a way of categorising and quantifying them.





1. Listen

WHAT TO ASK

There are lots of questions you can use. What, how and why questions all give different types of answer. Every word must be carefully chosen to hit three objectives.

UNDERSTANDING THE PRINCIPLES YOU LIVE WHEN YOU'RE AT YOUR BEST

- What makes a person a great fit here?
- How do you describe what it means to 'do things right' here?

UNDERSTANDING WHAT MOTIVATES PEOPLE

- Tell me a story of what makes you proud to work at your company? Why does this make you proud?

MAKING SURE YOUR VALUES WILL STRETCH YOU

- What principles will you need to focus on to be successful in the future?



2. Distil

Now you've got the data, you need to organise it to see the concepts emerging. These concepts are the starting point for defining your values.

HARMONISE

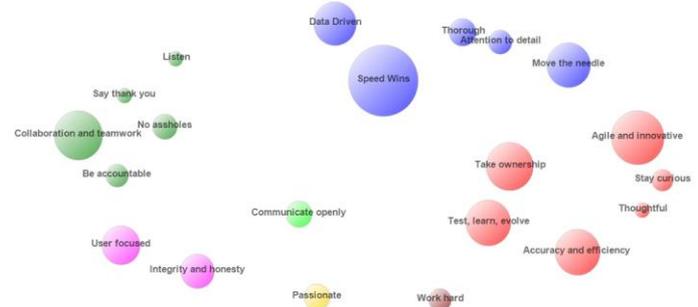
People use different words for the same concept (Proactive, Self-Starter, Gets Things Done etc.) so the first job is to harmonise the meaning or concepts.

WEIGHT

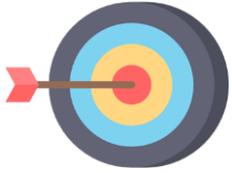
Then you can start weighting the concepts, so you can see where the weight of sentiment is. In true [Blue Peter](#) style, here's some I made earlier.



For smaller organisations, a word cloud does the job. This one's of the answer to 'what makes someone a great fit' for client who'd just secured Series B funding.



For larger organisations, you'll need a stats package. This one's of the answer to 'what does it mean to do things right here' for a multi billion dollar tech company.



3. Define

WHERE IT ALL STARTS TO COME TOGETHER

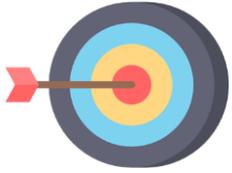
Get all the data out and see what themes are emerging. Or 'where the heat is' as an old Creative Director I worked with would say.

WHERE YOUR BRAIN IS GOING TO HURT

With the concepts forming, the next job is thinking them through. This is where your brain will hurt.

Ask yourself questions like, what will happen if we live this value? Is it really the source of great outcomes for us? Does combining these two, three, four concepts give us something good? Is there something deeper that underpins this concept? Is this too deep and vague?

To ease the headache, play with [thinking forwards and backwards](#) and [second order thinking](#).



3. Define

WHAT YOU'RE AIMING FOR

This example is from one of my tech clients. They had just secured \$10m Series B funding and wanted to get everyone aligned before taking a big leap forward.

You want to make three things:

The values space. The concepts you've found that connect with each other in a true and useful way.

The behaviours that sit underneath. Both the ones that exist and new ones you want to introduce.

A story to illustrate it. The ones that show this value is true.

<p>Driven / Proactive / Focus</p> <p>Start what you finish. Pragmatic over perfection. Ship V1, start on V2.</p> <p>E.g. Tech platform change</p>	<p>Team / Collaborate / Trust</p> <p>Leaning on each other. Considerate of others. Trusting each other. If failure, trust good intention.</p> <p>E.g. Breakfast news feature</p>
<p>Open / Speaking up / Right thing</p> <p>Doing the right thing. Image empowering not image airbrushing. Voicing opinions.</p> <p>E.g. New data team</p>	<p>Delight users / Quality / Customer focus</p> <p>Deliver great customer experience. Be entrepreneurial.</p> <p>E.g. Largest Client</p>



4. Refine

Here you're testing the values, refining the words to describe them and the behaviours you want from them.

ARE THEY BULLSHIT?

First you want to make sure your values aren't bullshit. Something you will stick to even when times are very tough. Imagine the hardest situations your business could be in, then apply your values. A good way to do this as a group is using [Even Over statements](#) e.g. Speed Even Over Quality. Learning Even Over Profit.

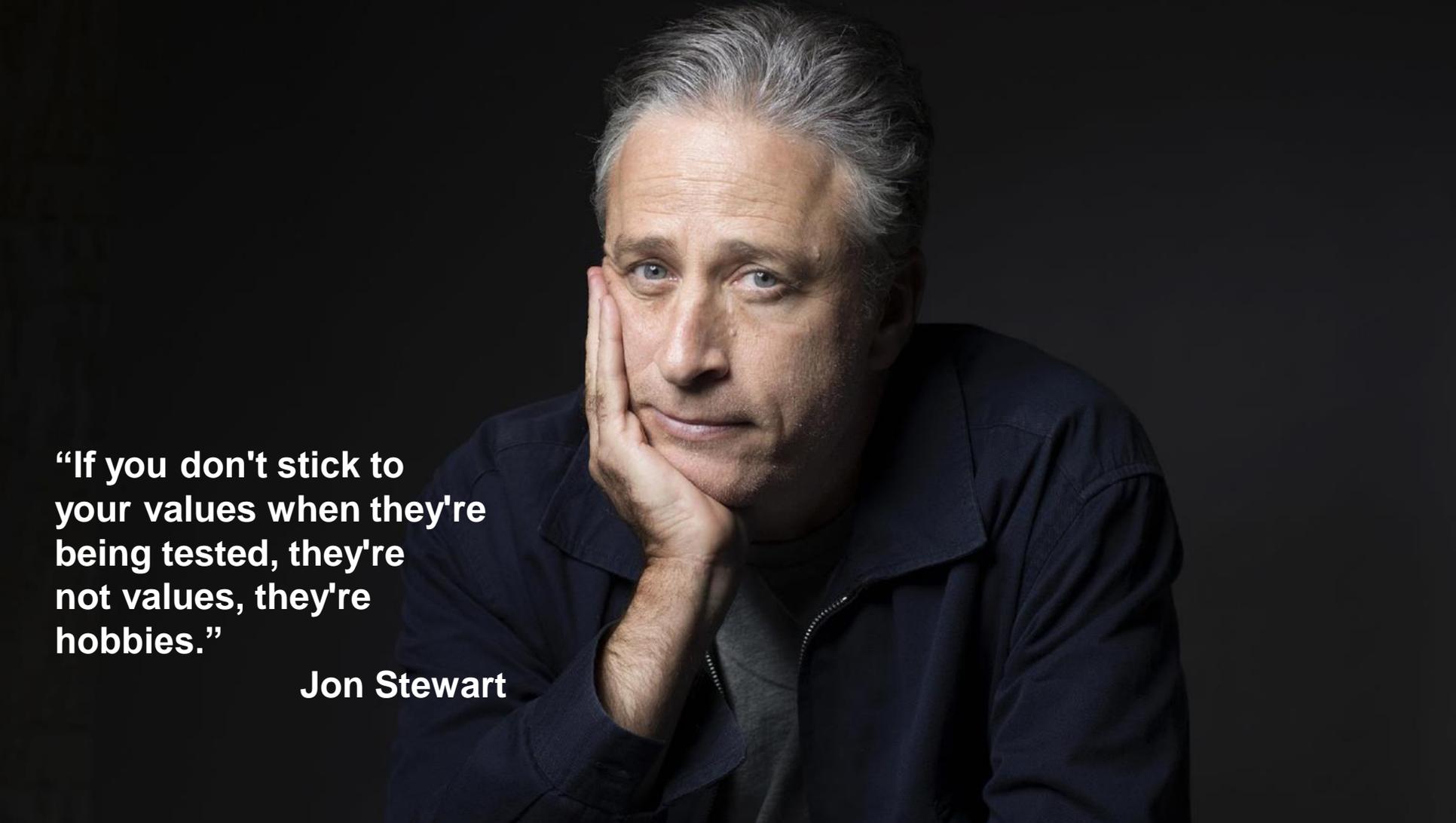
ARE THEY CLEARLY EXPRESSED?

This is where you test them with your team. The aim is to understand how your team interprets the values and behaviours. This is a process of iteration and refinement to make them sharp and clear. It is not the time for a complete rewrite though, because you have already worked through a data driven process to define them.



Bosh. Done*.

*Done as in defined. To get value from your values, you need to use them. Leaders role modelling them, making them part of your meetings, performance reviews and every other bit of your business. If you're straining your eyes to read this, [here's](#) a reward.



**“If you don't stick to
your values when they're
being tested, they're
not values, they're
hobbies.”**

Jon Stewart

About

This guide is built from years of experience helping companies work out what they stand for, what they believe in and why they matter.

Values is a big part of answering those questions. It's also gets results quickly because it's all about decisions.

I've done this work with global multi-brand corporates like TripAdvisor, famous brands like O2 and venture-backed start-ups.

I started my career in a values-led organisation. I know first hand how good being part of a gang on a mission is. Hopefully this Guide will help you build a great gang where you work.

I'm David by the way. If you've got questions, or want help, get in contact.



david@willandprogress.com



If you want a regular email with insights into what companies do to live their values, sign up [here](#).

**Good
luck!**

