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5 Attributes (*& Benefits*)

Of Values-Based Leadership

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I've studied and written quite a bit about core values as they relate to leadership effectiveness and the ability for an organization to build high-performance teams and drive the best possible business outcomes. I explore the impact of core values on organizational success in my first book, *TakingPoint*, as well as their benefit for personal growth and development in my new book, *Embrace the Suck: The Navy SEAL Way to an Extraordinary Life*.

“ As a former Navy SEAL, I was always fascinated by our Ethos & how it guides everything... ”

from our talent acquisition strategies to professional development, executing our mission, and fulfilling the vision of the organization. Essentially, the Ethos is a clear set of values and culture manifesto that drives how we make decisions and interact with those both inside and outside of the organization. Our behavioral norms and leadership competencies. It's the foundation of how we emotionally connect to each other and the cause. Everything.

Most (but not all) successful organizations that have healthy growth, sustainability and profitability, understand the importance of shared values and the connection to improved communication, building stronger relationships, and increased performance and results. But without values-based leadership, there can be no real authenticity to the guiding principles an organization seeks to live and operate by.

Values-based leadership instills a common set of values in all employees, improving their cohesiveness and willingness to work together. Knowing that a leader or manager has similar beliefs often encourages employees to follow their instruction, increasing the chance of success with every goal. This enhances engagement, performance, and even retention – all which foster growth and profitability. Values-based leaders have specific traits and other qualities that make them the best at what they do.

In this article, I define values-based leadership, explain what this type of leader does, list their key traits and discuss several of the benefits they bring to organizations. Here are five attributes we've identified at TakingPoint Leadership. That's not to say there aren't more traits we can point to, but our experience and research have these ranked at the top.



Self-Reflection

This behavioral norm is a necessity you learn very early on in Navy SEAL training. Values-based leaders take time each day to reflect on their recent decisions and motivations. Doing so offers them the chance to reevaluate their values, determine their purpose and discover what really matters to them as leaders and members of a team. Strong leaders have the willingness to assess themselves in these areas and the honesty to diagnose the truth. Effective self-reflection must often start with open feedback from those above you, your peers, and direct reports. This ensures the leader has the ability to identify and address blind spots in how they engage others, make decisions, and accurately communicate the vision.

Humility

I'll begin this section by saying I've made plenty of mistakes as it relates to values-based leadership in the past. Consistency of discipline in this area is a discipline in and of itself! Humility in leadership is the belief that they are no different than the people who work for them. These leaders believe that every employee holds just as much value to the company as they do. Humble leaders do what it takes to lift their teams up and ensure they are well taken care of for their work. Their ultimate goals involve protecting the team, pushing praise down, and taking total ownership over mistakes and missed opportunities. They understand that the performance and results delivered by the team rests with them. They continually ask themselves and others, "What can I do to be a better leader for this team?"

Balance

Values-based leaders have the ability to look at situations from different viewpoints and integrate diversity of thought from the team while leveraging the core values in all decision-making. They understand the value of each team member and therefore leverage the strengths of the team in all scenarios.

They know when to lead, when to follow, and when to set the direction and get out of the way. Values-based leaders are more effective at decentralizing decision-making and leadership because higher degrees of trust exist up and down the chain of command.

Authenticity

The most effective leaders are honest and transparent with their teams. And equally as important, their words match actions consistently on and off the battlefield. They continually lean on their value system in their personal and professional lives. They develop relationships in a very similar fashion inside and outside of the organization. They truly care about people which is made abundantly clear in their leadership style.

Authentic leaders are highly self-aware and engage in the practice of improving emotional intelligence. They are mission-driven and think long-term. And most importantly, they take every opportunity to integrate the organization's core values into all communication when appropriate.

Continuous Improvement

Due to their natural traits of authenticity and humility, leaders who take a values-based approach, are never satisfied with the status quo. They believe in receiving honest feedback, continuous improvement, and life-long learning. And they don't pursue continual development simply for themselves, they do it for the people they lead.



So, what does all this accomplish?

The three top organizational benefits are:

- **Improved communication** – Shared values in a team leads way to greater alignment. With the help of this alignment, employees and managers are free to communicate with each other, even on sensitive subjects. Everyone is more open about their thoughts and opinions. It also improves communication with those outside the organization by bridging the gap between company and consumer.
- **Stronger relationships** – People who have similar values to each other and to those of the organization will build stronger bonds, look out for each other, and engage in more meaningful interactions than those that don't. Plain and simple.
- **Higher levels of performance** – Values-based leaders drive higher levels of performance by selecting and developing talent that connect with the purpose and mission of the organization. Similar to the SEAL Teams, in this cultural environment, team members are willing to give more of their time, abilities and energy in achieving common goals. They put the team's needs before their own.

How can your organization take values-based leadership to the next level?

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