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MY COMMUNITY MATTERS

THE “WHY” BEHIND BECOMING A VALUES-CENTRIC ORGANIZATION

Is there anything more personal than one’s values?

What we value in life is rooted deep inside of us and closely held values will direct the course of our actions and activities. Personal values reflect our own ideas of right and wrong and our views on how things should or ought to be. Values influence people’s attitudes and behaviors; what people say and do are often based on their values.

Recently I had the pleasure of meeting Ann Rhoades a well-known business author and respected human resources expert. She conducted a two-day seminar at the annual Community Foundation CEO Retreat that was held in San Francisco. Ann is known for “creating values-centric cultures” in her consulting with major corporations around the country. All the credentials and accolades aside, what I learned from her is very valuable. In a setting with 35 of my colleagues from across the country, all of us having read Ann’s latest book, *Built on Values*, we discovered that from the smallest of organizations to large corporations, an environment can be created to construct corporate cultures that encourage innovation and give people the ability to, as she says, *accomplish the extraordinary!*

Many organizations tout their values by mounting the words on a wall visible in their offices, or print them in an annual report or post on a website. We have our values posted on the stabile in the upper lobby of our building. Our values were created by staff in a strategic planning session a number of years ago. We re-visit them periodically to ensure they still reflect who we are and what we really value. The values we proclaim are:

- **Innovation** - Embracing creative thinking and implementing new ideas.
- **Respect** - Honoring individual self-worth and creating a community of inclusion.
- **Inclusion** - Celebrating and fostering all aspects of diversity.
- **Excellence** - Performing at a level that exceeds expectations and inspires trust and confidence.
- **Exceptional Results** - Changing the community for the better.
- **People** - Transforming our community through the expertise of our staff, the gifts of our donors and the efforts of our grantees.
- **Hope** - Encouraging donors, nonprofits and the community to believe in a better future.

These are great values, but what Ann Rhoades would say is: *How do you bring them to life and help people live the values for the betterment of the organization?* She contends that the people working in an organization need to understand what the values are to become the best that they can be while moving toward the ultimate vision of what a business is actually trying to accomplish. She says the internal culture cannot be forced, but an environment can be created from which a positive and empowering culture can emerge. She emphatically states the *environment you want can be built on shared, strategic values*. The hard part comes when identifying the behaviors that exemplify what the values mean. It is then, that we can continue to build an organization that is superior in terms of moving from what is currently happening to a “wow” state.

For us, bringing to life the behaviors associated with a value can be exemplified in the value *innovation*. The behaviors connected to this include *taking calculated risks without fear of failure, learning from mistakes and moving forward in a positive way*. Another key value of ours is *inclusion* which can be brought to life by *speaking up* against all “isms” including racism and sexism, and by assuring that each voice is heard and respected.

The values exercise has tremendous meaning to all of us at Grand Rapids Community Foundation. We have a positive internal culture and we are moving forward continually building an environment that will bring this good culture to a “wow” culture! I think highly of our staff, I know that they also want our community to soar in terms of human kindness, addressing complex issues and solving knotty social problems.

Each reader of Current is important to the Community Foundation and I think you deserve to know that the staff and Trustees are focused on making this a responsive and forward-thinking organization because our community deserves (and expects) it. ■



To read more of Diana’s writing about philanthropy and social change issues her blog features regular postings. It can be accessed at grfoundation.org/blog. Your comments on her postings are welcome and encouraged.