

Core Values **in** the Workplace.

25 Experts Share Tips on Creating
and Working by Principles



#FINDYOURFORWARD

Introduction.

Every business has its own DNA. It's what they do with that DNA that makes the difference.

Core values are the guiding principles and beliefs that drive a company's culture and reflect the mission at large. When defined accurately and with acute intention, core values can help companies grow and evolve without losing touch with what matters at its core — hence the term core values.

While the benefits of defining and living by core values are immeasurable, the process of actually creating and observing them is an ongoing effort requiring input from every leader, department and team member.

If you're reading this, you've likely done some research to start the process of creating or revamping your company's core values. In your research, you've likely discovered list upon list of core value examples, which are a great place to start. Now that you've gotten a taste of what other companies have defined as their core values, you're ready to start the process yourself.

This ebook is going to take your research to the next level. We've connected with 25 experts across seven markets ranging in industry, role and experience to better understand the process of creating and utilizing core values to build and maintain a strong company culture.

TABLE OF Contents

- SECTION 1: Establishing Your Core Values
- SECTION 2: How Core Values Shape Company Culture
- SECTION 3: Recruiting With Core Values in Mind
- SECTION 4: Scaling With Your Core Values
- SECTION 5: Living By Your Core Values
- SECTION 6: Celebrating Your Core Value Champions
- SECTION 7: Final Advice

SECTION 1

Establishing Your Core Values.

Knowing where to start is by far the hardest part of defining your core values. Above anything, it's important to make this a collaborative effort. You may want to start by brainstorming with people across departments and experience levels to cast a wide net of opinions and experiences within the company. It could also be a task designated to a specific set of people, whether that be members of your leadership or a group of interns. There's no wrong way to get started, but this certainly isn't a single person job. It will take a lot of time and effort to get your core values defined and finalized.

Once you have some ideas to work with, you'll want to narrow your focus group and have a series of review sessions until the majority of your team is satisfied with the definitions you've established.

In this section, we asked our experts:

How did you come up with your core values?

SECTION 1

How Did You Come Up with Your Core Values?

Our values were established very early in our company history. Once we realized that we had something special and were starting to grow, we wanted to make sure as we brought more people into Spanning that we did not stray too far from what made Spanning...Spanning. We spent a lot of time writing down what we thought were core traits or attributes that we found refreshing, unique and important in the way that we worked. This effort was led by the senior management team and included a ton of input from representatives in each part of the company. We wanted a bottoms-up representation of who we are, not a top-down vision of who we wanted to be.

— **Jeff Erramouspe, CEO at Spanning Cloud App**

One of the reasons I came to Apto was because of its culture. We had top-notch people but we needed a little direction. Identifying and articulating our core values would provide that direction and help align different areas of the business. We realized our original core values just weren't internalized.

We asked everyone in the company to participate in small group sessions to talk about their personal values and how they might translate into company values. Feedback from all the sessions was aggregated into themes and painstakingly distilled into a set of core values by a cross-functional team. Surfacing core values from the employees themselves not only reflects the company culture, but also gives employees a greater sense of ownership and meaning.

— **Angela Tucci, CEO at Apto**

SECTION 1

This process started out as a need I had from a recruiting perspective: ‘Why will people want to come to work for us besides salary and perks?’ Following a discussion with my CEO and senior director of sales and marketing, we launched a project for our 2016 summer interns focused on uncovering our weaknesses and strengths in our social media presence. What they didn’t realize was that their internship project was a big part of our research for uncovering what Somnio’s deep values are.

Our ‘Core Values Forensics Team’ dissected their research and collaborated on key elements of ‘What Makes Us Somnio.’ Once we had an idea of how we wanted to present these bold statements, we got our executive team focus group involved and eventually finalized what are now Somnio’s six core values.

— **Harold Valderas, CEO at Somnio**



SECTION 2

How Core Values Shape Company Culture.

What comes first: core values or company culture? If you defined your core values early on, it will help your team recruit based on your established principles. On the other hand, if you established a successful business without core values guiding your recruiting, you can define your principles with the help of a team that already understands your culture and mission.

Remember: your core values are not set in stone. They're a critical part of how your team functions but they can, and should be, reevaluated over time. As your company evolves, no matter how much you emphasize your values and work by them, different times and people will influence your culture and mission.

In this section, we asked our experts: *How do your core values shape your company culture?*

SECTION 2

How Do Your Core Values Shape Your Company Culture?

I went around to our team and said, 'Don't think: Give me a gut reaction. Describe our culture in one word.' What'd they come back with? 'Empowering. Collaborative. Empathetic. Family-oriented.' Some had to stretch to a phrase: 'A safe place to be ourselves and share ideas.' But mainly, we bring in people who get it intuitively. So it's something you feel when you walk our halls. We have a team of folks from diverse backgrounds, and they're all driven by a purpose. That means there are a lot of strong beliefs, but we hold them loosely (or try our best to), so we stay open to new ideas.

— **Bert Greenberg, People Engagement Leader at Devoted Health**

We think of our culture as the SHYFT experience. We have built our culture based on trust, honesty, quick wins and mistakes. No one culture is perfect and it takes some failures to get it right. We have focused on aligning our core and foundational values into everything we do and then have added unique twists to make SHYFT culture so unique. We have worked hard to create a culture of inclusivity to allow trust and transparency to come to life.

— **Michael Brown, VP of Talent at SHYFT Analytics**

SECTION 2

Our culture is built around three core values: authenticity, continuous improvement and entrepreneurship. Authenticity keeps us true to ourselves, each other and to our work — especially to the IPs with which we work — and to our customers. Continuous improvement means we have no sacred cows.

We work in a dynamic, rapidly-evolving sector of the gaming marketplace, and if we're not better every day, we're getting worse. We're continually evaluating our best practices to make them truly the best practices possible. Finally, our entrepreneurship culture enables us to take intelligent risks and innovate in a team-driven manner.

— **Jennifer Ramcharan, VP of People Ops at Disruptor Beam**



SECTION 3

Recruiting With Core Values in Mind.

Core values are an essential part of the recruiting process from start to finish. Attracting candidates that align with your stated values will increase the odds of making a successful hire and retaining them for the long haul. But how do you do it?

As you begin interviewing candidates, you'll want to prepare some questions related to your core values to determine whether candidates believe in your mission or if they're just trying to get the job. An easy way to do this is to ask questions that require the candidate to think about times where they have actually demonstrated your core values in past experiences. At the same time, you'll want to provide candidates with examples of how your company actually lives by your core values so they understand what you stand for.

In this section, we asked our experts:
How do you recruit candidates who embody your core values?

SECTION 3

How Do You Recruit Candidates Who Embody Your Core Values?

In all interviews, a well-rounded team assesses skills and value-fit. Peers, direct reports and managers are all part of the interview process. By the end of the candidate's time at Networked Insights, we want them to know what working with everyone would be like. In addition to the core skills of the job, we want to know if candidates embody our core values of collaboration, ownership, leadership and an entrepreneurial spirit. Our values make us unique as a company, and we want new colleagues to add to our culture.

— Deborah Evans, People Manager at Networked Insights

When it comes to recruiting, the same core traits we needed when we were smaller are still needed now. There are more opportunities, more people and more complex decisions to be made. Now, more than ever, we need people who share our core values and our culture. So we continue to hire the whole person, rather than just a resume.

— Matt Pulley, CTO at Home Chef

Trust and execution are core values at LeafLink. We actively recruit for these traits and instill them in all our team members. To us, that means taking ownership and responsibility to deliver on the area you are tasked with. By delegating with trust and expecting execution, we can get more done as an organization. At the same time, providing ownership and staying out of people's way to deliver is also a powerful thing for an individual in terms of engagement and satisfaction.

— Zach Silverman, Co-Founder and CTO at Leaf Link

SECTION 3

When interviewing, I try to ask about how a candidate handled situations in the past. You can tell a lot about someone by the way they manage success and failure. Do they take all the credit? Do they place blame on others? Do they learn from mistakes? Answers to situational questions like these will help myself and other interviewers identify key indicators of a candidate's values.

— **Lacey Garner, Talent Acquisition Manager at Shopgate**

We use interview questions designed to focus directly on culture, reinforcing how critical our company values and culture are throughout the hiring process. When I joined a little more than a year ago, in addition to the executive interviews I had, I was interviewed by two different culture panels made up of about a dozen employees. It was a great experience that truly reflected how important our company values are to each and every team member.

— **Hank Seale, Founder of Q2eBanking**

We look for clues in ways big and small. If a candidate is on time, polite and friendly to our receptionist, then they're demonstrating good judgment. Their portfolio can speak to their history of creating amazing experiences. Past jobs, even summer jobs in college or having a side hustle, can show the scrappiness of a candidate. Spending 30 minutes to an hour with someone in an interview is generally a good way to tell if they have good vibes. Even something as simple as a 'thank you' follow up email from a candidate shows gratitude.

— **Adam Lyons, Co-Founder of The Zebra**

SECTION 4

Scaling with Your Core Values.

Recruiting is one thing. Scaling during a big growth phase is another. Change can be extremely challenging and stressful for everyone involved, and if your company is growing rapidly, your teams are going to need to adapt fast.

Your core values should be a guiding factor for how you scale your company and culture in a meaningful way without losing sight of what's important. If you're going through a period of rapid growth, know that your culture will inevitably change, and that's okay. You can always reevaluate your core values to better align with your newer, bigger team.

In this section, we asked our experts:

How have your core values reinforced your culture while scaling?

SECTION 4

How Have Your Core Values Reinforced Your Culture While Scaling?

With all the change that growth demands, it's important to hold on to the core values you start with. For us, that means being true to our purpose: to make a measurable difference each day for healthcare providers and their patients. It means earning our customers' satisfaction. It means placing enormous value on our employees, with a focus on hiring and promoting from within. We have always felt it's important to get teams excited for the journey and reward them well for great work. If I'm doing my job, I've conveyed that to our staff from the beginning, and continue to today.

— **Luke Kervin, Founder & Co-CEO at PatientPop**

Transparency is not only a key part of our mission statement, it's deeply ingrained in our culture and how we work. To ensure that transparency and our other values remain intact as we scale, we implemented a culture club, of which I was a founding member. The culture club is made up of a diverse set of employees who are committed to helping the company retain its core culture and represent what both our founders and employees value.

For the Label Insight team, remaining true to our core values and continuing to check in with our team members to ensure we are living those values has been key to maintaining our culture and the transparency we all value as we've scaled.

— **Abbie Bys, Product Manager at Label Insights**

SECTION 4

Building a consistent culture starts with the hiring process. First and foremost we look for employees that are a great culture fit by tying our values and competencies into the interview process. Once they're in the door, we continue to listen to what our employees have to say, where they continue to define our culture. We also provide several types of employee engagement and recognition programs, such as Spot Awards. These are an opportunity for employees to recognize their colleagues for going above and beyond with a personal note and gift card. Although scaling up events can pose a challenge for growing companies that are trying to keep budgets in check, we think it's important to continue to invest in traditions that have always been a part of EdX culture.

— **Jessica Burchill, Chief Happiness Officer at EdX**

Culture starts at the top. Our founders live and breathe ezCater values, and that trickles down through management and to individual teams. We've been able to maintain our company culture throughout the growth we have seen in the last year. Truly, it is a team effort. It is not uncommon for people to cross-check our core values on a given topic. We talk about these values a lot, whether we are making a hiring decision, changing a process or explaining a technical decision.

— **Jillian Kando, Senior Engineering Manager at ezCater**

SECTION 5

Living by Your Core Values.

Whatever your core values may be, it's critical that you and your team live by them. Every. Single. Day. While it is up to everyone in the company to contribute to the culture and endorse the company's values in their daily work, your leadership team has a significant influence on how the rest of the company functions. Newer and younger employees will look to more experienced team members as role models, so provide your team with the right resources to lead by example.

***In this section, we asked our experts:
How does your company ensure your
team lives by your values?***

SECTION 5

How Does Your Company Ensure Your Team Lives by Your Values?

In addition to every employee having a copy of our mission and core values on their desk, we also award trophies to the people that embrace each value most. These awards are representative of each specific value and voted by their peers in the office. Our core values apply to the top (C-level), bottom (entry level) and everywhere in-between.

With our new goals, we are going to create an entryway display that defines and reminds each employee of our values – it will allow every one of us to start and end our day with the motivation that comes from them, propelling TicketCity forward.

— **Caitlin Sullivan, Employee Engagement & Culture at TicketCity**

One of our six core values is ‘achieve excellence together.’ The key behaviors associated with this value are to collaborate and celebrate, and drive as a team toward the larger mission. We talk about our values every day and use our portal to recognize coworkers who are living the values.

— **Kate Hyatt, Chief People Officer at Healthgrades**

SECTION 5

Our core values of respect and integrity are interwoven into every element of our company. We mine for these values in our interview process and only hire people who will embody them as employees. Further, we include and rate our employees' performance against our core values in their annual reviews so that their growth and future with the company hinges on their ability to live out these principles each day. Socially, we carry out respect for others and live with integrity through our StratEx Serves initiatives. These events enable our employees to find creative ways to give back to those in our community who are just as deserving of the same respect, love and opportunities as we are.

— **Gretchen Van Vlymen, Head of HR at StratEx**

Our core values act as the driving force behind our mission. They are not just signs on the walls or meaningless words. We live and breathe our core values every day, from the top down and bottom up.

For example, 'Family First' is an important core value at Billtrust. Work shouldn't be your first priority in life — go home and spend time with your family! At Billtrust, we offer paid parental leave, an open PTO plan and sabbatical policy that allows each employee to spend some well-deserved time with their family.

—**Kimberly Perez, HR Generalist at Billtrust**

It can be cliché to say it starts at the top, but it really does at Redgate. Transparency is a core value of our executive team, and it allows the rest of the company to understand our direction and what we need to do in order to reach our goals. As that understanding flows downward to each employee, it naturally creates a flat structure, encouraging employees at every level to work across functions and on a variety of projects to achieve that common goal.

— **Jason Young, Senior Sales Manager at Redgate Software**

SECTION 6

Celebrating Your Core Value Champions.

You have defined your core values, recruited stellar talent and instilled your values in your everyday culture. Now it's time to celebrate by seeking out opportunities to applaud the individual team members who embody your values in their daily work.

Not only is recognition a critical part of boosting employee engagement, but it reminds your team to keep core values top of mind no matter their role, experience or history at the company.

***In this section, we asked our experts:
How does your company celebrate employees
who demonstrate your core values?***

SECTION 6

How Does Your Company Celebrate Employees Who Demonstrate Your Core Values?

Top performers who are notably making a difference for both customers and the organization are invited to our annual awards ceremony and trip called the Circle of Awesomeness. We also host quarterly town hall meetings where we recognize team and employee accomplishments tied to company values.

Additionally, we have a culture board led by our CEO to ensure our culture remains strong as we grow, as well as culture leads for each business group to promote volunteer opportunities, charity events and fun activities within the company.

— **Kim Rutledge, Senior VP of HR at Q2eBanking**

Every month we recognize a selection of staff members who have been nominated by their colleagues for reflecting our company values. In addition, we host an annual awards evening for our staff where we celebrate those who have best personified these values throughout the year.

— **Derek O'Carroll, CEO at Brightpearl**

SECTION 6

The primary way that we celebrate active demonstration of our values is with our quarterly MVPav award. This is a play on the notion of an MVP, but goes to the people who not only achieved something significant for the company but also clearly demonstrated our core values while doing so. ... Beyond this, we try to call out clear demonstrations of our values during our bi-weekly all-hands meetings.

— **Jeff Erramouspe, CEO at Spanning Cloud App**

When we rolled out our new company values in August of 2017, we had an all-hands company meeting where various leaders in our company presented the new values and provided examples of how they are already alive at BuildASign. The presentation was followed by shutting down the company for the rest of the day and spending the afternoon celebrating at a waterpark. We also award multiple cash prizes quarterly to our 'BuildASigners of the Quarter,' who are folks that exemplify our core values in their work life and interactions.

— **Ashley Birkeland, Communications Manager at BuildASign**



SECTION 7

Final Advice From the Pros.

Before we bid you adieu, we wanted to leave you with some final advice for companies defining or revamping their core values. There are a number of ways to complete the process, but the only way to figure out what works for you is to get started.

If you've made it this far, you have more than enough knowledge to start the process. We won't sugar coat it — it will take time, resources and a lot of work, but we can't emphasize enough how important it is to establish your company's core values. You will without a doubt reap the benefits of your efforts when you recruit, engage and retain employees who align with your mission and principles. And with that, here are three final pieces of advice for companies working to identify their core values.

***In this section, we asked our experts:
What advice do you have for companies
trying to identify their core values?***

SECTION 7

What Advice Do You Have for Companies Trying to Identify Their Core Values?

Try not to get too fancy or extravagant with your core values. Core values are just that — something you feel in your core, in your gut. Really analyze what qualities and aspects your people/team represent, think about how you want new employees, customers and competitors to view you, and at the end of the day, use language that identifies with your own company culture. Don't get bogged down in trying to 'impress.'

We like to keep it real, and that's the best advice we could give others when thinking about defining their core values.

— **Harold Valderas, CEO at Somnio**

Young companies need to determine their mission, what they want their company culture to look like and how they think they can achieve it. The most important thing is after defining your values, you must strengthen them by inspiring your workforce to embody them persistently. When this happens, everything from your bottom line to employee happiness to customer satisfaction is enhanced.

— **Caitlin Sullivan, Employee Engagement & Culture at TalentCity**

SECTION 7

Find your focal point, your values and mission, and let this compass be your guide. Take the time to define these core values, involve others by focus groups. Be intentional in defining your core values. Spend the time and energy. Involve the people that are going to own the company's core values. Embed the values in everything that you do as a company.

Further, ask key questions about where you want to be as a company and what kind of company would you want to work for. How do you want to inspire others to live the core values? What type of people do you want to employ? Once employed, make sure employees feel like they matter, show that time was taken in developing perks, benefits, and the work environment. Go beyond the bland value statements and empty statements. Inspire!

— **Ashley Crill, Director of HR at Abrigo**



It's Time To Get Started.

Now it's time for you to take what you've learned and apply it to your own project. Will it be easy? Not always. In fact, almost never.

But it's absolutely critical. We began this book by saying that when defined accurately and with acute intention, core values can help companies grow and evolve without losing touch with what matters at its core — hence the term core values. Hopefully after 25+ pages of expert advice you now feel the same way.

Thank you for reading, but the journey to develop your core values isn't over. It's just beginning.





United We Tech.

Built In helps tech professionals stay on top of trends and news, expand their networks and carve out futures at companies they believe in.



Let's work together.

CONTACT US