

# Organizational Values and Culture of Service



Ed Rehkopf



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### Creating a Lasting Organizational Culture

We frequently talk about the importance of developing a club culture in our organizations. What exactly do we mean by an organizational culture? The dictionary defines culture as *“the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another.”*

With a slight modification of this definition, we come up with the following working definition of organizational culture. *“The sum total ways of working and interacting built up by a group of people within an organization and transmitted from one generation of employees to another.”*

The major benefit of establishing an organizational culture is that once adopted by the majority of people in an organization, the culture takes on a life of its own and pervades the workplace. As normal turnover takes place, new hires quickly learn that to be accepted in their new surroundings, they must embrace the culture and make it their own.

In the absence of a culture developed and disseminated by the organization’s leadership, a culture will arise on its own, usually fostered by a vocal few and often cynical and at odds with the purpose of the organization.

So how do you create a culture in your organization? First, you must define clearly and succinctly the aims of your organization and what it aspires to be. These are most often found in Mission and Vision Statements. Beyond these basic statements of intent, one must clearly spell out standards of behavior and performance. These can be in the form of Guiding Principles, Operating Standards, Leadership Principles, Service Ethic, Principles of Employee Relations, Organizational Values, Service Pocket Cards, a Code of Professional Ethics, or any other formal statements describing the “What, How’s, and Why’s” of how business should be conducted.

Yet publishing such principles and statements, no matter how inspirational and well-written, will only foster employee cynicism if the values are not enthusiastically embraced by the organization’s leadership. On the other hand, when leaders demonstrate their commitment to the organization’s values by their daily example, employees will do likewise.

With well-defined values and the enthusiastic example of leaders, the ground has been prepared for the fruits of organizational culture, but just as in growing a garden, preparing the soil is only the first step. The real work for a successful harvest is the daily tending – watering, fertilizing, pruning, weeding, and pest control. In the case of an organizational culture, it is daily reinforcement at every opportunity with all employees that continues to focus individual attention on the values that underlie everyone’s efforts.

In some cases, it’s publicly recognizing an employee for embracing and utilizing the values in their work relationships or service rendered to members. In other cases, it’s privately correcting an employee who has ignored or transgressed the culture. In extreme cases, it’s discharging the employee who refuses to accept the group norm. The key is to continually remind employees of the organization’s values and elevate them from words on a page to an animating spirit that infuses every aspect of the organization and its work.



From the process of continually accentuating and reminding one achieves a breakthrough like that described in Jim Collins' book, *Good to Great*. *"Sustainable transformations follow a predictable pattern of buildup and breakthrough. Like pushing on a giant, heavy flywheel, it takes a lot of effort to get the thing moving at all, but with persistent pushing in a consistent direction over a long period of time, the flywheel builds momentum, eventually hitting a point of breakthrough."*

This breakthrough is reached when the organization achieves a critical mass of employee buy-in. Though the process of establishing an organizational culture requires patience and persistence as well as leadership and example, when breakthrough is achieved, the culture takes over and is self-sustaining – with the employees holding the bar high and policing their own ranks.

In such an organization, employees understand what must be done and how. Motivation and morale are sky-high as employees are empowered by their participation and contribution. The leader, relieved of the burden of constantly following behind employees to ensure they are doing the right things, can focus on strategic issues and the future of the organization.

The importance of a well-defined and promoted organizational culture cannot be overemphasized or underestimated in its impact on quality, performance, and member service. The only thing that can screw it up is for the leader to fail to show an ongoing interest or set an uncompromising example of the organizational culture and its values.

### **Eight Steps to a Lasting Organizational Culture**

1. Define and embrace values.
2. Set unimpeachable example.
3. Constantly and enthusiastically reinforce – especially to leadership team.
4. Indoctrinate new hires into culture.
5. Praise and reward those who conspicuously uphold and foster the culture.
6. Correct and counsel those who don't. Discharge as necessary.
7. Do not let anyone disparage or ignore the culture – especially subordinate leaders.
8. Preach the message at every opportunity.



## Club Values

The following values are at the heart of all we do as individuals working for our members, guests, and co-workers. These values must become second nature to all – from the general manager who leads the club, to the managers and supervisors who direct the day-to-day operations, to the most recently hired new employee.

To avoid these values merely becoming empty words on paper, words that are read periodically and promptly forgotten in the press of business, the club requires that its values be fully supported by managers at all levels, reviewed daily during our club *Daily Huddles*, and fostered at every opportunity by our leaders to constantly connect the details of our daily tasks to our larger vision.

In addition, each manager and employee of the club will be issued and expected to carry one of our Values Pocket Cards. These cards will be used during *The Daily Huddle* and at any other appropriate occasion to reinforce our “reason for being.”

All club managers and supervisors must understand these basic operating philosophies and strive to reinforce them with our employees at every opportunity. A common understanding of our goals and methods is essential to our mutual success.

As you read through our values consider the many ways that you might use to reinforce them to your subordinate managers and line employees. Also, recognize how your actions and example as you go about your daily duties can either contribute to or hinder a better understanding of these values.

- **Mission** (*What we do!*): Understand and exceed the expectations of our club members and guests we serve. *Given that each club member and guest may have different expectations for the service we provide, it is up to each manager to understand those expectations and then motivate his/her employees and organize his or her operation to exceed the expectations.*
- **Vision** (*How we expect to do it!*): Through innovative programming, member-focused service, and principled Service-Based Leadership, we are dedicated to establishing a premier private club experience for our members and guests. *Our members have joined the club and pay a premium to enjoy the highest quality club experience possible. We will focus on understanding their needs and desires, organizing the club operations for efficiency and quality, and directing and training our employees to provide Remarkable Service levels.*

## Guiding Principles (Principles that guide the conduct of our business!)

- **Proactive leadership with service-based philosophy.** *Our leadership is active and engaged, while strictly adhering to the principles of Service-Based Leadership (see Insights and Ideas - Service Based Leadership).*
- **Forward-thinking, professional expertise.** *Our professional knowledge should not only be up to date, but we should be constantly looking ahead for cutting edge concepts and best practices.*



- **Proven management and operating systems.** *We utilize proven management practices and operating systems to efficiently organize and operate our club.*
- **Sound planning and effective implementation.** *All our projects and tasks must be planned thoroughly and implemented completely.*
- **Innovative programs continually reviewed.** *We offer innovative programs, and we continually review them to make improvements.*
- **Detailed benchmarks constantly analyzed.** *We benchmark all areas of our operations and analyze them for better performance and best practices.*
- **A commitment to staff development and empowerment through formal, ongoing training.** *We operate in a detail intensive business and can only achieve excellence by thorough training and retraining. Employees must be empowered to succeed and to solve quality and service issues whenever encountered.*

#### **Operating Standards (Standards that form the basis for our operations)**

- **Our vision and goals are articulated.** *Our Club Strategic Plan lays out the long-term goals for the operation. Club Annual Goals are prepared as guides and targets for accomplishment. We put them in writing to formally commit ourselves to their accomplishment.*
- **We are uncompromising in our commitment to excellence, quality, and service.** *To serve the highest echelons of our community, we must set and commit to the highest standards.*
- **Authority and responsibility are assigned, and accountability assured.** *Managers are assigned both the authority and the responsibility to direct their areas of the operation according to our highest standards. These individuals are held accountable for their results.*
- **We embrace innovation, initiative, and change while rejecting the status quo.** *We seek continual improvement in all aspects of our operations.*
- **Standards are defined, operations are detailed in written standards, policies, and procedure, and we seek continual improvement of products, services, programs, and operating systems.** *Written standards (or the expected outcome of our “touch points” or “moments of truth”) for our products and services are detailed in written policies and procedures. We seek continual improvement in these (Insights and Ideas - Beyond Oral History).*
- **Service issues are resolved politely and promptly by our empowered employees.** *No explanation needed (see Insights and Ideas - Empowered Employees).*
- **Constant communications and feedback enhance operations and service, while problems and complaints are viewed as opportunities to improve.** *We can never communicate too much or too well. Informed employees are better employees. Problems brought to our attention allow us to focus on solutions.*





- **We benchmark revenues and sales mixes to evaluate members' response to products, services, and programs, and we benchmark expenses, inventories, and processes to ensure operational efficiency and cost effectiveness.** *We must pay close attention to what our members are telling us by their spending habits. Benchmarking and analyzing expenses, inventories, and processes help us be more efficient.*
- **We ensure clean, safe, well-maintained facilities and equipment while safeguarding club assets.** *A good bottom line is only one measure of our effectiveness; we must also take care of all club facilities and safeguard its assets.*
- **We acknowledge each operation as a team of dedicated individuals working toward common goals and we recognize the ultimate value of people in everything we do.** *While each employee has his or her own duties and responsibilities, every employee of our club works toward the common goal of understanding and exceeding the expectations of our members and guests. Ultimately our business is about people, and they must be valued and respected wherever and whenever encountered.*

## **Culture of Service**

Service is our only product. We aim to provide the highest possible level of service to our members and guests. To do this, we must:

- Anticipate their desires and needs.
- Set standards of excellence that challenge us every day.
- Understand that when a member or guest perceives a problem, the problem is ours. The burden is ours to solve the problem and change the perception.
- Make everything about our operations as easy, simple, and clear as possible for our members and guests. Communicate clearly and in a timely manner any changes in operations, policies, or programming.
- Be formal and professional in all our dealings with members and guests. Always use names and titles, such as Mr., Mrs., Dr., when speaking to members or guests. If you don't know a person's name, use "Ma'am and Sir." These common courtesies demonstrate our respect for those who pay our wages.
- Demonstrate a sense of enthusiasm about our jobs. A sense of teamwork and a true willingness to help and serve will naturally contribute to this enthusiasm.
- Seek comments, criticism, and feedback about our efforts. Graciously accept criticism and complaints without becoming defensive. Apologize without hesitation. Take corrective action as necessary (see *Insights and Ideas - Service Recovery - Are Your Service Apologies at Risk?*).

## **Commitment to Employees**

We pledge to conduct employee relations in an honest and straightforward way. Therefore, we will work hard to ensure that:



- All employees are treated with dignity and respect.
- All employees are important to our team effort. We do not tolerate discrimination or harassment in any form.
- Rules, regulations, and policies are applied uniformly and fairly.
- Every employee is properly trained.
- We communicate goals, plans, projects, work conditions, and performance expectations.
- We provide positive feedback and recognition, as well as accepting our responsibility to correct and enhance performance as necessary.

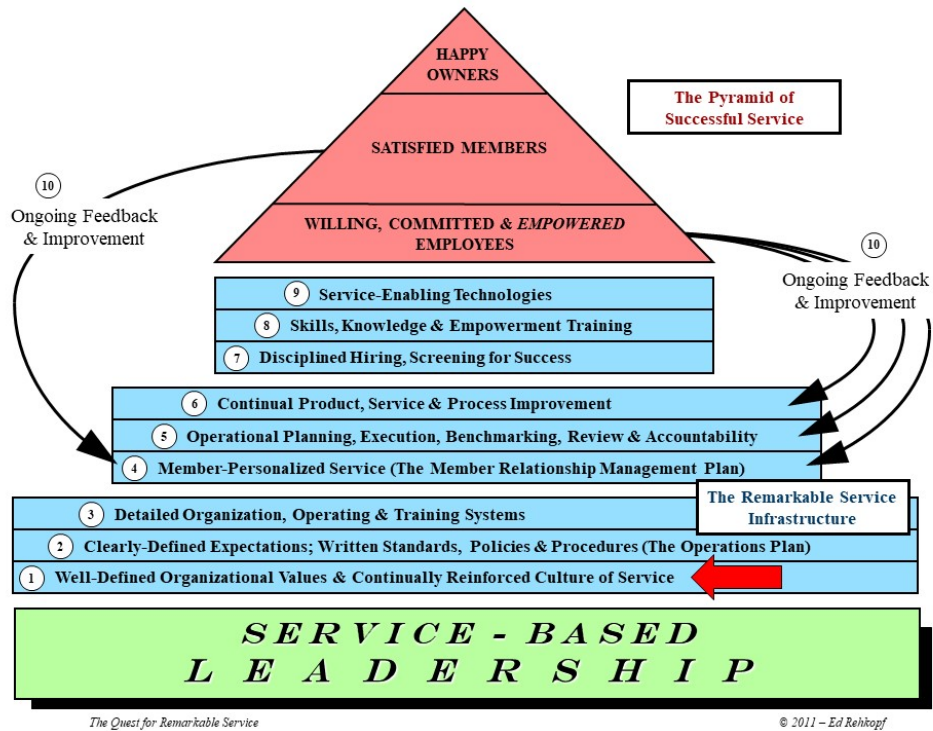
### **Teamwork**

Because we are a team committed to a common effort, we:

- Treat co-workers with courtesy and respect.
- Are considerate of co-workers. Cooperation and understanding make everyone's job easier and more enjoyable.
- Recognize accomplishment and thank co-workers for their efforts.
- Understand that every employee contributes regardless of position.
- Offer assistance, and ask for help whenever necessary – this is, after all, the hallmark of a team.

### **Remarkable Service Infrastructure**

The Remarkable Service Infrastructure provides an overarching plan for structuring your club to provide remarkable service to members and guests, as well as depicting the important role of values and culture.



(See *Insights and Ideas - Remarkable Service Infrastructure - An Overarching Plan for Club Excellence* for more information)



*About the Author*

Ed Rehkopf is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy and received a Master of Professional Studies degree in Hospitality Management from Cornell's School of Hotel Administration. During his long and varied career, he has managed two historic hotels, managed at a four-star desert resort, directed operations for a regional hotel chain, opened two golf and country clubs, worked in golf course development, and launched a portal web site for the club industry.