

Building a Professional Team
... As opposed to assembling a team of professionals
By Tom Wagner, president, Wagner Consulting Group

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develop employee management skills,
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Business is becoming more competitive because:

- Customers have more information about choice, a broader range of options, and more negotiating power over pricing,
- Minimum customer service expectations are rising because disruptive companies (like Amazon) constantly raise the bar,
- Conventional small- and medium-size businesses are threatened by:
 - Nimble new competitors, like Project Frog in construction, and
 - Large companies seeking new market segments, and
- A slow-growth economy that results in pricing pressure.

Accordingly, businesses are seeking new ways to differentiate themselves. One area I have noticed is an emphasis on “professionalism.”

Professionalism in action varies slightly from one industry to another, but an accounting firm and a commercial electrical contractor face more similar challenges than you might think. Quality work, on-time performance, good customer communication, and fair and easy customer complaint resolution are all hallmarks of businesses with repeat customers.

The keys to professionalism are hiring the right people and creating a culture that fosters and rewards teamwork. Culture defines what is expected in an organization. Employees are more productive and deliver more *discretionary* effort when leaders create a culture that rewards entrepreneurial spirit. Personal entrepreneurship is a discretionary act.

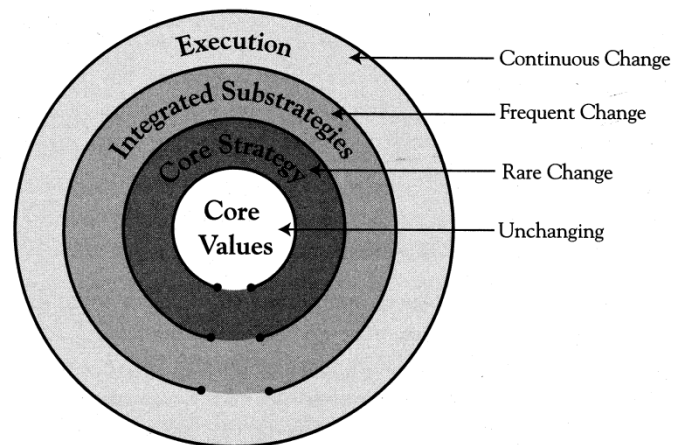
At the foundation level, great companies build a *humane* community (the organization and its partners) that *humanely* serves customers and the broader communities in which they live.

Humane values power excellent companies, and these companies insist on hiring people with seven core values to stay excellent.

1. Excellence - pride of achievement
2. Joy. A joyful workplace uplifts the human spirit. Have fun and celebrate.
 - a. Pet day, Hat day, indoor golf tournament.
 - b. Monthly Good News days: personal & business good news, awards given
3. Innovation
 - a. Strategic: doing the right things, and
 - b. Operationally: doing things right
4. Respect for employees, clients, suppliers, and the community
5. Teamwork - enriches employees' quality of work life
6. Social profit - analogous to profit sharing, investing in the community
7. Integrity

Core values help define strategy and how the company's service or product is delivered, as shown by the following graphic

Strategy Connections



In the 1970s, Edward Deci and Richard Ryan began work on what became the Self-determination theory which states that people are most strongly motivated by three universal human needs. They called these needs autonomy, competence (herein, "mastery"), and relatedness (or purpose).

- ❖ Autonomy – acting with choice.
 - May be autonomous **yet** happily inter-dependent with others.
 - Higher productivity, greater job satisfaction

- A boss can support autonomy with:
 - Empathy,
 - Meaningful performance feedback, and
 - Encouragement to take on new projects.
- Cornell University carried out a 2004 study of 320 small businesses that revealed those offering autonomy grew at 400% over a control group and had only 1/3 the employee turnover.
- ❖ Mastery (competence)
- ❖ Purpose. Related – connected to one another. Common vision, etc.

The seven human values cited previously all relate to either mastery or purpose.

Autonomy within a business setting involves personal control over:

- Task: Organizing your work
- Technique: How you carry out your work
- Time: When you work
- Team: People with whom you collaborate

However, this freedom requires personal accountability with a broader management structure. The four key to managing autonomy follow.

- Set important goals.
- Keep score
- Personalized coaching within a relevant framework
- Public and private recognition for good results

Use “surprise and delight” to exceed customer expectations

Cora’s Nine Rules of Success (From Cora Griffith, a café waitress in Wisconsin’s Paper Valley Hotel)

1. Treat customer like family - Make them feel welcome and comfortable
2. Listen first
3. Anticipate customer wants
4. Simple things make a difference - Little things count
5. Work smart
6. Keep learning
7. Success is where you find it
8. Be a team player - All for one, one for all
9. Take pride in your work

Investing in employee success

1. Strong beginnings. Get all new hires off to a good start, and especially demonstrate the values and behaviors management most desires.
2. Continuous learning; keep the saw sharp.
3. Encourage “ownership” attitudes among employees. This includes but goes beyond the concept of equity ownership; it also means owning processes and problems.
 - a. Visualize the difference between a business owner – who will spot anything out of whack and will stoop down to pick up a stray piece of paper – with a disengaged employee who moves around in a slow daze.
 - b. Picture the energy and sense of urgency of an employee who loves their job and strives to do their best.
 - c. The desired culture will include a “See it, own it, fix it” mentality among all staff, not just top managers.
4. Leaders who want to encourage personal accountability and professionalism:
 - a. Model the desired behavior,
 - b. Show employees they are valued as *people*, not just workers,
 - c. Give employees decision space to succeed,
 - d. First extend trust to receive trust, and
 - e. Always remember to say, “Thank you. You made a positive difference today.”

Some concepts adapted from *Discovering the Soul of Service* by Leonard L. Berry (1999)