



Values and Value Threats

Many of us have been through the exercise of generating mission, vision and values statements. Even more of us have seen the abandonment of mission, vision and values as the realities of day-to-day business take over.

By Dan Zahlis

Navigating the maze of hallways and meeting rooms at city hall, I took a moment to read over the posters adorning the walls. I saw letters of commitment, pledges to employees and citizens and the all-important mission, vision and values statement.

I eventually was ushered into the mayor's private conference room. This meeting was the result of a bold request by me, because I thought we could offer him a way to help his city and local businesses tame the workers' compensation beast. Since the mayor is a fellow actor and friend of California's "Governator," we also were hoping for an opportunity to invite the entire state to participate in the Active Agenda.

What had prompted my request was a television appearance by the mayor, which was wrought with an understanding that culture is key to performance. We just knew he would embrace the Active Agenda.

And then it happened. City employees from the risk management department began to funnel into my "private" meeting with the mayor.

Recognizing this wasn't going to be the informal meeting we had hoped for, I began to explain Active Agenda to the risk management staff. "The city already has one," one of the employees politely interrupted me. "One what?" I had to ask. "Software that tracks injuries and disabili-

ties and does statistics." I assured this fellow that the Active Agenda was quite different from his traditional description, and it was far more than a product. He reassured me the city "had one."

I explained that we were not trying to sell them anything. We were trying to solicit their participation in an Active Agenda to share ideas and reduce risk around the globe.

Core Values

I asked the attendees if the city had a list of core values. This was offered as an opportunity for the mayor to give the speech I had seen on television.

As expected, the mayor sat up straight and began reciting the city's core values and reinforcing the pride the city takes in its employee-formulated values. He rattled off the values precisely as I had seen them listed on the poster in the lobby.

Already expecting what the answer would be, I asked, "How often do you threaten or violate your core values? In other words, how often do you say one thing and do another? How frequently, and formally, do the city's employees let you know about values threats? How often does your staff record their thoughts about how decisions or events may impact core values? Can you answer with a pie chart?"

I could tell the risk management folks were having some trouble making the connection between risk management and values, but the mayor seemed to have an "a-ha!" moment. He immediately offered an analogy to illustrate his understanding of the importance of tracking information upstream of loss.

The mayor shared an experience from his professional football career. He told us his team was getting "creamed" every time it ran a particular play on the right side of the field. He said it hadn't occurred to the team why the play wasn't working until a statistician noted that the team ran the same play every other down. The analogy wasn't perfect, but it was helpful.

Track Cultural Indicators

The mayor had illustrated the importance of upstream measures – preceding loss – and he made the connection with business culture. If we believe culture drives performance, why not track cultural indicators and make corrections before the culture suffers?

Few things can be as harmful to business culture as saying one thing and doing another, especially when our actions and decisions directly violate the core values we so publicly, repeatedly and vehemently endorse. Nevertheless, we continue to place great importance on the formulation of core values to guide business actions while failing to measure our actions relative to these values. Wishing it so doesn't make it so. Saying it's so, when we illustrate it's not, almost guarantees it never will be.

Are your actions reinforcing your message? How do you know? Can you answer with a pie chart?

What Gets Measured – Active Agenda's Values module enables organizations to breathe life into their values statements and share values across an enterprise. The Values module is "connected" to many of Active Agenda's other modules, thereby allowing organizations to associate "harmful" or "reinforcing" events, activities and business practices with core values.

The separate (but related) Value Threats module tracks reports of threats to, or violations of, core values. The data can be viewed centrally across an enterprise and generate charts and reports for analysis. This is not a bad chart for the CEO, or the mayor, to place on their dashboard.

What Gets Done – The Value Threats module automatically generates Threat Report forms so that employees and other stakeholders (e.g., customers) can report threats to, or violations of, core values. The Values modules allow organizations to manage the process of aligning core values with the practical realities of day-to-day business.

This Month's Links

- **Written Program:** <http://www.activeagenda.net/documentation/index.php?title=Values>
- **Support Wiki:** http://www.activeagenda.net/documentation/index.php?title=Values_Module
- **Forum:** <http://www.activeagenda.net/discussions/viewforum.php?f=73>