

## **Corporate Alignment Two Approaches**

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When an organization's mission and purpose are based on shared values, and the vision and annual plans and goals are built around those values, the mission, the purpose, then quantum leap results can occur effortlessly and systematically. However, when this clarity and alignment fail to occur, mayhem can transpire, or at a minimum, leaders will be required to work harder and longer to achieve their aspired goals. Without clarity of vision, chaos and confusion can be the order of the day!

I have had the privilege to work as a Leadership Strategist and Executive Coach with a Senior Leadership Team of a manufacturing enterprise in the Midwest over the past few years. This organization has a very inspiring mission and purpose and every senior leader and most middle managers are in full alignment around that mission and purpose. They actually get excited about what they are accomplishing; however, their accomplishments come at a very high personal and corporate cost. For a number of years, each senior leader was working very long hours and spent most of their time on task management and putting out fires. Very little, if any, time, focus and attention were spent on strategic thinking, planning and defining what success would look like.

With so many shared values and such great alignment around their mission and purpose, how could there have been such struggle and such a high cost? For the most part, they all valued generating the results more than they valued focusing on the process that they were using to generate these extraordinary results. As a result, they rarely "connected the dots" to see opportunities to more easily replicate the extraordinary results and more importantly, they did not, as a leadership team, see how to more effortlessly and systematically generate the extraordinary results on a daily basis without so much hard work and long hours.

There were also a few disconnects among the individual values of the senior leadership team. Some valued independence more than teamwork. Others valued doing "work-arounds" more than getting into authentic dialogue about what was working and most importantly, what was not working. Some senior leaders had a history of being "nice" and therefore were duplicitous and stepped over issues until a blow-up or melt-down occurred.

The good news is that there were enough shared values among this leadership team that these obstacles could be easily overcome. The root cause of their challenge and the reason that they all had to work so hard is that they had not taken the time to develop a Vision and subsequent annual plans and goals that were based on the shared values and the mission and purpose of the organization. Without this road-map for decision-making, every idea appeared, at least initially, to be a good idea. This was compounded because the CEO values bold innovation so much that it became for him a strength with too much intensity, or as I often say, the volume was turned up too high. This negatively affected his ability to boldly create and, consequently, he generated even greater chaos for the organization.

The organization's Board made the decision several years ago to invest in a manufacturing plant in Asia. The plant had been through two bankruptcies and subsequent restructurings and could be purchased at a deep discount. The CEO and COO lead the Board to the decision to invest in world-class engineers to staff and lead the operation. Sadly, this decision was made in a vacuum, without consideration of their other ongoing plans and goals and without detailed clarity of the bigger vision. While these investments were significant, they were small compared to some of their U.S. operations that were also in a significant growth mode. In addition, the parent company had only been in its own turn-around situation 5 years prior, so internal and external relationship building and fence-mending were still primary focuses of both the CEO and COO.

With the focus of the CEO and COO so diluted, and without clarity of Vision for the entire organization, the Asian operation did not get the attention that it needed and deserved. While the CEO regularly met with the head of the Asian operation to communicate and to seek alignment, they didn't realize they each had different Visions. In addition, the COO, CFO and Senior VP of Human Resources and their teams spent almost zero time and resources on assisting the Asian operations in building the necessary infrastructure and aligning that infrastructure with the US Operations. Financial reporting and operational alignment were almost non-existent. As a result, the morale in the Asian operation was very poor, there was tremendous chaos and confusion about where decisions were actually made and, most importantly, the leader of the Asian operations was given the responsibility to build a profitable and productive enterprise but was not given the authority, resources or assistance to build those in a manner that was in alignment with the parent company's vision and mission. He built an organization based on his own vision and mission.

As a result of this disconnect, the Board, CEO and entire Senior Leadership Team expressed tremendous frustration about the Asian operations and were perplexed by that

leader's actions. However, without their attention and focus, the leader simply filled that leadership void as best he could with his own vision and mission based on his own personal values and career aspirations.

By working with both the Chief Executive of the parent company and his team and the CEO of the Asian operation and her team, we, at the Halpin Companies, were able to help them see these huge disconnects. From this learning experience, the entire organization now sees the value in taking time to focus on their own Vision and aligning their annual strategic plan, operation plan, regulatory mandates and growth opportunities with their shared values, their vision for their organization and their organization's purpose and mission. Out of this alignment and the recurring discussion required to maintain the alignment, the organization is now provided with a road-map for decision making. They value being nimble and flexible to take advantage of opportunities as they arise and now make these decisions in light of much more data and information about what other commitments they have made or intend to make. They now regularly ask themselves, "At what personal and corporate cost will we be accomplishing these initiatives?"

Each Board Meeting and executive leadership meeting begins with a review of their values, vision and mission so that agenda items can be addressed in the context of these driving forces. As a result, the decisions that are made are in alignment with the big picture.

The annual goals and plans are reviewed each quarter at an off-site retreat to ensure that commitments and expectations are being met, role clarity is maintained, and resources are available (staffing, funding and time) to ensure that the results created produce a quantum leap but without the historical high personal cost of the leaders or poor morale among divisions.

Simultaneous to each quarterly off-site meeting among the executive team, each senior leader conducts a similar "operations review" with their direct reports to drill down and ask these same tough questions about accomplishments and accountabilities and continuously negotiate expectations.

The results that are now being created continue to be in the area of quantum leap but, more importantly, these results are coming to the organization much more systematically and much more effortlessly because everyone is on the same page and the organization has the mechanisms and structures in place to stay on the same page.

The senior leaders realize now that, without being faced with fire-drills every day, they can think more strategically, communicate more effectively and ensure that their vision, mission, purpose and goals get translated down to each level of the organization, from senior management to the front-line people who interface with their customers.

If you are interested in increasing the alignment in your own organization to eliminate fire drills and the subsequent high cost of that kind of chaos, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do we all know and believe in our corporate Values?
2. What behaviors are we, the senior leaders, modeling for the organization that demonstrates we intend to “walk our talk” with our values?
3. What structures do we have in place to ensure that we all stay in alignment around our vision, mission and purpose?
4. Who am I being, as a Senior Leader, who has allowed my organization to deviate from this kind of disciplined, structured approach?