

Ep #189: The Problem with Company Values



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Tobi Fairley

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You are listening to the *Design You* podcast with Tobi Fairley, episode number 189.

Welcome to the *Design You* podcast. A show where interior designers and creatives learn to say no to busy and say yes to more health, wealth and joy, here's your host, Tobi Fairley.

Friends, how are you? We are getting close to episode 200. Will we hit it before the end of the year? Maybe. I don't know. We've got 11 to go, that's so exciting. But even more exciting at this very moment is today's episode. So I hope you're well. I'm doing great over here now that the temps are a little cooler and I can drink coffee by the fire every morning and start my day in that lovely way. It makes my whole world great. So I hope that you're enjoying some of the little things this time of year too.

Today I want to talk to you about values, or if you want to call them core values. That's kind of the same thing. And today we're kind of specifically talking about values in the business sense. But you also might have thought about your personal core values and they can be related. But when it comes to company values, do you know yours? If you're a business owner or if you work for a business, do you know what the company's values are specifically? And not meaning I kind of do, I could kind of guess, I sort of know what we stand for.

I mean do you actually know them specifically? And I would say most people would say yes when I ask that question, if you know your company values. But when I dig a little deeper the truth is you can't really name them. You haven't specifically articulated them. You can't fully, if you even have written them down as words, articulate or explain what they mean to you. And beyond all of that, which is the most important part, you're not activating them, which means you're not actively using them in the day-to-day operations and decision-making in your business.

So today's episode is technically called the problem with company values because for most companies big and small, if you have company values at

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all they're not really something that is being used as your north star or your compass for your leadership. It's not really something you're relying on or using on the day-to-day. And I want you to know that you could be and what a gamechanger it is.

So we're calling it the problem with values, meaning the problem with most people's company values is if they exist at all they're just on some piece of paper somewhere, maybe in a Dropbox, maybe stored somewhere. Nobody really remembers them and you're certainly not using them. Now, if you do have them they were probably derived from doing a values exercise once upon a time. Someone said you should, you read it in a book, or a consultant, or someone who said you should do this.

And so you wanted to check that box of yes, we've decided ours. And so yeah, they're on that document somewhere, possibly even listed on your website. Although I see very few, if any, creatives and designers sharing their values publicly. I see lots of pretty, pretty pictures, and services, and how to work with us. But what I don't see is our company values and how we really activate them. And I would be so inspired and excited if I saw a lot more of that. And you're going to see that coming to our brand new website really soon.

But let's be honest, the values that most people have, if you do have them, the ones you're writing don't really merit being shared publicly anyway because they're not really super meaningful, or heartfelt, or clear a lot of times. Typically I see things that sound and feel good, I guess. They make sense, they sound aspirational or inspirational in theory. But they also feel very corporate and stiff, or even stale a lot of times. And even if they are words that have potential a lot of times they're not really explained with context or intent.

So you might see things written as company values like integrity, or honesty, maybe a value is customer service. We value customer service or we value support, we value people, we value connection, we value quality

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or craftsmanship, we value authenticity. They say that but what does that even mean? And sure, any of those words can be good for your values.

You might even land on some of those after this conversation today. But if they're just written on that piece of paper that no one in the office even knows where it is, and certainly no one in the company could name them, much less, live by them. Then what is the point of having them at all? And I see lots of articles that say that very thing. Why even have values, or a mission statement, or a vision statement if it means nothing to no one and we're not really living by it?

So I say all of this, not at all to tell you not to bother with values. In fact it's just the opposite. I'm telling you this in hopes that you will get in the trenches with your team. Or if you're a one person show, find a friend or a peer and really work together to do this work to take a hard look at your values, your company values. I want you to get really curious and ask a lot of questions and those questions of yourself, but also maybe of your team if you have them.

And the goal is to pick five to seven words or so to start, we're going to narrow it down from there. But pick five to seven, maybe 10 max words that are in the running for your values. Maybe they're even phrases sometimes instead of just a word if that's helpful. But start to narrow down between five and 10 of these that feel right. And put them on paper so that we can put those potential values through a rigorous process of really thinking critically about them and questioning them to make sure which ones are the right ones, to make sure they hold water, to make sure that they pass the test.

You want to try them on for size actually. And ask yourself when you're looking word by word, does this particular word or phrase actually guide me in the decision-making and the day-to-day operations of my company, much less the bigger decisions, the longer term decisions, the 40,000 foot view decisions? But a lot of people can say yes to those. And I want you making sure that they definitely guide you in the day-to-day, that's the most important part.

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So you really want no more than three to five values if possible. Because you want to be able to actually memorize them and have your team memorize them. And then be able to activate them as we're calling it, embody them, use them. And you want your team to do this also. And if there's too many of them or they're too complicated and long, or they're hard to remember, nobody's going to connect with them and they're not going to remember them. And they're certainly not going to use them.

You also want the possibility that your audience could even remember some of them, your customers could even remember some of them. One of mine, we're going to get to this in a little bit is honest and direct. And just yesterday one of my long term clients called to ask me a question and she knows, I know you always shoot straight with me. And that's basically her saying, she knows we value honest and direct. That's how we show up. So that's what you want to be able to happen with your customers and your clients.

And the more you understand what you value the more they will understand what you value. Okay, so here is how you start to try them on for size once you have a handful of them, five of them, seven of them, maybe 10, but the fewer the better. Here's how you really start to try them out and see if they're going to be right for you. You want to start to use them in hypothetical or even real if you have some current decisions that need to be made.

But at the very least, hypothetical scenarios that you might encounter in your business, in the day-to-day and with clients and other things. And see how they work for you. So for example, if you wanted to hire a team member based on your three to five core values that you ultimately land on, would these three to five words support you in hiring team members? And you'll see more of what I mean in a minute.

Would they guide you and guide the person that's applying to really know what you stand for, or what you mean by the things you say in your job description, or how you and your team will show up every day? There's a

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difference in my value as my company value being honest and direct versus just being people pleasers or telling people what they want to hear. So you get just from our job description, before you've even had an interview with us, you are understanding, we're going to tell you the truth about things in the day-to-day, that's how we're going to operate.

Then you get on an interview with me or one of my team members and you get that very experience. So for example we wouldn't say something like, "Okay, thanks for your interview and your time. We'll get back with you", when we know they're not a fit. We might say something like, "You know what? We have some other candidates that we're really considering right at this moment. But if something changes about that we will keep your name on our list. And if anything changes we could potentially circle back with you." Or "You know what? I don't think you're a fit right now for the team."

We're honest and direct all the time always. And it says so because our values are even listed on our job descriptions and the website. So if you're using them in this way it's going to make a difference. If you're using them to deal with a challenging operations decision, maybe you have to fire someone. Or you're dealing with an upset team member or client, do your values help guide you to show up in an authentic and consistent way, like being honest and direct?

Or having a growth mindset, which is one of ours, are you close minded in other words? Or are you being open minded to how you might deal with this upset team member or upset client? Your values can actually help you show up in the world the way you want to which is amazing. Say you wanted to make a charity donation or a contribution. Do your three to five words guide you in what types of organizations you support, or how much or how often you give? They absolutely can. Or do they help you know how to lead your team, what to pay them, what benefits to offer?

Do they help you define and refine your voice on social media and decide what to share, and how to talk about that thing, and how to talk about your company, and what you do, and what you believe in as a company? Your

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values can make a difference. They can show people how you're unique, how you're different, what you believe in maybe, that not everybody else does. And it can be a way to even help you stand out.

If not, if you're not using them, or you're not able to use the words that you're considering for all of those instances to guide you in your hiring and your firing, and giving contributions and charity donations, and leading your team, and how you talk on social media then they're not working. They're not the right ones yet. Keep working at them. Go back to the drawing board, they just aren't there yet. Because you want real actionable words or phrases that truly guide you. And I'm going to share mine with you in a little bit and you'll see what I mean.

So it might sound too good to be true, that three to five little words or phrases could truly guide you from moment to moment in your company. But I promise you it actually is true. It's one of my favorite shifts that we've really made in our business in the last few years because it's made my life so much easier. It's kept me from getting in confusion or getting stuck moment to moment because I absolutely know how we believe, and where we stand. And my values guide me in all of our decisions.

So besides sharing mine in a minute I'm going to share another example of a few other words and how you might think about them, just to show you. I want you to have some ideas of how these can work. So before we do that I want to talk to you about how to take values that aren't quite right, before we get to mine, I'm going to give you these other examples. And I want to talk to you about some that aren't quite right. They're close but they're just not quite hitting the mark.

And give you some examples on how to get really curious about them, and to tweak them, and to shift them until you have just the right words that are truly that north star for you. So we started this work in our company getting really clear on our values about probably 18 months ago. And our first set of official values weren't really exciting yet, or meaningful, or actionable. They were very boring if I'm being honest, they were pretty boring and

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pretty corporate sounding. And definitely there was a disconnect between me and those words.

So if I wasn't really feeling them even at that moment when I was writing them, how were they supposed to inspire me or inspire other people, or help me lead other people? They wouldn't. So we worked really hard to make sure they were the right word and that they were truly heartfelt and connected to not only me but the team as a whole.

So let's take a look at a set of words, these are just some random options. There's a million out there, as many words as there are in the world probably just about. So many options, or at least as many adjectives. And let's start to think about the ways that you would want to show up, or the ways you would want to act, or the things you would want to do. So I guess some of those are nouns too.

And we'd really want to think about what those words are that are going to give the right connotation, the right meaning, the right feeling, the right mood and vibe that we really want to set for our company and start to narrow those down as our values. And we're going to take these few examples I have. We're going to pick them apart. I'm going to show you what I mean by when they're not quite right and what we might do about it.

So let's say in my example our values are integrity, support, quality and craftsmanship, authenticity and freedom. So that's five. One of them is two things combined because they're related, quality and craftsmanship. So we've got integrity, support, quality and craftsmanship, authenticity and freedom. Now, these aren't mine for my company, although I do love a lot of these things. But they sound pretty good. They sound like, yeah, those sound like those could be a company's actual values.

So let's break them down one at a time and see how they could be activated in a company or maybe where they're not quite right. So let's start with integrity first. So what do we even mean by integrity? Well, a lot of different people are going to mean something different. But when we do a

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quick Google search, the definition of integrity is the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles or moral uprightness. Sounds pretty amazing. I think we all want to believe that we are honest and have strong moral principles.

But here's the big question. If this is your value of integrity, how, think about that for a minute, how are you going to activate integrity, or practice integrity, or embody integrity in the day-to-day of your business? So let's say you're an interior designer and you or someone on your team makes a mistake on a client's sofa order, completely a mistake, not the supply chain stuff we're dealing with, an actual human error.

So you make a mistake and it takes twice as long to arrive as it should have which that's saying a lot these days because I think the current supply chain is making our furniture lead times 24 weeks. But let's say it takes you, okay, in that instance maybe a third longer. But even whatever the case, it's a big mistake, causes a big issue, you have to start from scratch, maybe even the whole sofa was made wrong and shipped to you in the wrong fabric, the whole thing.

What are you going to do with regard to integrity with your client? Are you going to own up to the fact that you, or your company, or a team member made this mistake? Or are you going to use this prime excuse right now to blame it on all those supply chain issues, and all those containers stuck in the ports and just be like, "I have no idea what happened here." Act as if it wasn't your fault. Who knows when the oven will be in. Because hey, what your client doesn't know won't hurt them.

It might not hurt them but that's not being honest and having strong moral principles as integrity is defined. That's not showing your team either to own your mistakes. It's actually teaching your team to hide mistakes and lie about them, and cover them up, which is the opposite of you want to teach your team to do. You wouldn't teach your kid to do that. You certainly don't want to teach your team to do that because the next thing you know they'll be hiding and lying about things and covering things up from you.

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So if you are going to use this excuse of the supply chain problem to not own up to what actually happened and take responsibility, yes, you'd fix it. But just to say, "Hey, I wanted to let you know, this happened, I'm so sorry. It's going to cause this delay. Here's what we're going to do about it." If instead you're always hiding and lying, covering things up from your client you are not acting with integrity. And it may feel like splitting hairs here sort of, what we're talking about because they wouldn't have known. But this is exactly what I mean by truly activating and embodying your values.

If you are living by the value of integrity, even if it feels terribly uncomfortable to own up to what happened, you will still do the right thing if you're truly practicing your value. And you'll tell the client the truth, you'll own the mistake and you'll see what you can do to make it right for them. So if you aren't willing to do that then you don't really value integrity, you value something else, staying out of trouble. And so it's not a slam on you. You don't have to have integrity as your value.

And I'm not intending to shame you either about that, any value is the right one if it fits for you. But just don't pick a value that you're really not willing to stand behind because that can do more harm than good especially with your team if you're saying one thing and doing another, but that's true for your clients too. So this sort of not honoring them, having them but not honoring them is the exact thing that makes values not work. It makes everyone start ignoring them.

It is critical if you want to build a business and a company culture that is based on values like integrity or maybe it's trust, or honesty, or whatever values you pick. Then you want to actually walk the talk. That's how you create a company culture that you're really proud of and that really works. So next let's look at another word. Let's look at the second one.

Support we said was the second one. So what do you mean when you say support is your value? It can mean a lot of things. The definition of support is bear all or part of the weight of something or hold it up. Another definition of support is give assistance to, especially financial assistance, enable

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something to function or to act. So if you're giving something assistance to enable it to act, or work, or to give financial assistance to it, that is also support.

So if support is one of your company values, maybe you completely get behind support when it comes to your clients in the way of emotional support, or good customer service, or client care. And you're like, "Yeah, we've got that dialed in, we are really good at support." Their every need is met, we take such good care of them. That would be one of the ones that I think people can really understand. But here's where support might get tricky for you.

So maybe support is your value and you're really good at supporting your clients but what about your team members? Are you ready to truly support your team members? Let me tell you what I mean. Are you willing to invest your time or company time and company money to truly have your team's back? For example, do you offer health insurance, and benefits, and paid family leave? Because they need all of that because they have kids. And sometimes their kids are sick, sometimes they're sick and they need support. Do you pay for that from your company?

Do you offer plenty of paid time off and vacations so they can be well rested and mentally healthy? Do you truly put people, your people, your team members before profit? Do you allow your team members to be human first and a team member second? Meaning you really honor their humanity above all. If you don't, you don't really fully value support. And maybe instead, instead of doing all those things, instead of giving health insurance, and paid family leave, and plenty of paid time off or vacation if you call it that to help be really healthy.

And investing in the team members and allowing them to be truly human, maybe instead you overwork your team a lot and you just tell them there's nothing you can do about it. Because you know you all, we're just so busy right now. We have so many clients and we can't help it. We all need to work long hours, and nights, and weekends, and we just don't have the

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money to pay for extra stuff. What if you're constantly having your team members work long, long hours and have crazy stressful deadlines, as if you're not the one typically setting the deadlines, because we are.

And even if we're not, we can support our team with deadlines because we could speak up to a client or a contractor and say, "You know what? For the wellbeing of my team we need more time. That's not enough time. We can't have your presentation by then, or we can't finish your home by then, or we can't do your installation on that day." But most of us are not doing that. We're people pleasing our clients at the expense of our team.

So that's what support could look like internally if you were either really leaning into it and caring for people and putting your money where your mouth is. Or if you weren't walking the talk and you were kind of throwing them under the bus and making them work long hours, and not having their back. Which one are you? Because only one of those truly embodies support. And sadly so often what I see is the second one. I see companies practicing their values maybe just with the clients but not with their team members.

I see outwardly, we look like we're walking the talk. But if you really had a conversation with the people that work here they would talk about how it's not all it's cracked up to be and that the work situation is rough, or tough, or uncomfortable, or we're overworked, or we're even miserable at times. That happens a lot with companies, In our own company we intentionally say, "Team before clients." It's not one of our actual values.

Some of our other values speak to something that kind of covers this. But in our company manual and manifesto we specifically talk about how we put our team first truly ahead of our clients. And that may sound crazy, but if I don't love the heck out of my own team and have their back and help keep them protected and well rested then they won't be here to help me love on my clients. So it really behooves me and makes sense to me to take care of these people that work for me so they will help me take care of those people that pay our bills and want to do it and do it well.

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Okay, let's look at the next value, quality and craftsmanship. So this one sounds good especially for a design firm, we can get our head around that for sure, yes, we champion quality and craftsmanship. But are you really walking this talk also? Check in with yourself. The definition of craftsmanship is the quality of design and work shown in something made by hand or artistry. So if I were to look at your work, would I see 90% mass produced product? And would I see a lot of product that's not great quality?

And even if it's not product that is sourced at market, some companies there do craft their furniture really well. And they kind of pride themselves they say on quality or craftsmanship. But get really critical about your thinking here. How good is the quality of our products? How much of it would we really consider craftsmanship or artistry? And how are we showing up in that value with our company? How much of it do we even put in our projects?

And on that note what other vendors or quality do we show versus cutting corners? Do we use the best movers, the best cabinetmakers, the best light bulbs even, the best Christmas gifts made by artisans? Are we putting quality and craftsmanship into everything we do? Do we hire people on our team who really value craftsmanship and artistry too? And do we allow them to show up in a way in their role that is really creative?

Or do we have them just doing whatever we tell them to with little room for artistry or creativity and maybe even a little tiny budget to not do a great job, or really unrealistic timeframes so they can't do a great job? That's not really valuing quality if we don't even let our team members have space to do quality work. Do you ask your team members to wear 10 different hats on your team or more, believing that you don't have a choice and you can't afford another option?

And when you have them wearing all those hats, how good is their work really? Do they stay in their zone of genius or are they really kind of having to accidentally be mediocre at a bunch of stuff because you're asking them to do way more than they can do in a timeframe that doesn't even allow

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them to be good at their job? And in what other ways could craftsmanship or quality show up in your business? Maybe when hiring or when running your operations, do you cut corners?

Do you even buy the cheapest copy paper? Heck, do you buy the cheapest toilet paper at your office? I mean that truly could be a sign of your value that is not in alignment with quality and craftsmanship. So you get to decide what you mean by it. But if most of how you're showing up is out of alignment with what would be perceived as the value of quality and craftsmanship then that's probably not the value you need.

So I hope this is blowing your mind a bit, I really do because I want you to carefully select and then actually use the values that you choose so they can help you become the kind of company that you're really proud of and that makes a difference in the world. Okay, let's look at the last two on our hypothetical values, authenticity and freedom.

So authenticity is the quality of being authentic. And authentic by definition is real or genuine, not copied or false, representing one's true nature or beliefs and even could mean true to oneself. Okay, that sounds amazing. And it's a really super popular buzzy word right now these days. We hear it a lot. And when we hear it I think rarely do people really even know what they mean by being authentic.

In fact, most of us aren't being very authentic. I mean we're being a version of our authentic self. But it's kind of like more of a little bit of a façade version of our authentic self because we tend to be the version that we think the world will like and that the world will approve of, other people will accept, that people won't reject. And so we're like, "If I was truly my authentic, authentic self, no, that would be really uncomfortable and people might reject me or might not like me."

And so we don't really show up in that at way especially when it comes to things like company values, being authentic requires us to determine even what that means for the company. What is authentic for the company? Is it

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based on the founder's personality and personal values? Is it based on something else? You've got to get clear on this one because authentic is a little slippery and hard to pin down. But if it's vague, and slippery and unclear, a term like authentic doesn't really help you, doesn't guide you.

So unless you're very self-aware as a person and a company and not afraid to be true to yourself versus being popular because a lot of times our authentic self isn't the most popular self. In fact a lot of times it's more polarizing. And if you're not willing to do that then it's going to be virtually impossible to be authentic as a value and to activate it. So when you're thinking about this, how might authenticity show up?

I can see it showing up in when you're courting a client, trying to close a client or maybe you're sort of courting a potential team member to bring them on to your team. Being authentic might mean that you're brutally honest. And you're really yourself in those moments. And you aren't putting on a version of what you think will get the other person, the client or the team member to say yes to you. But the latter of putting on the façade is what most people do. They don't want to scare them off.

Authenticity would be being honest. And a lot of people can't imagine trying out real authenticity as a value when you think of it this way. Because it can even sound like, "That would be terrible for business. What would happen, those clients, and those team members and relationships?" They wouldn't want to say yes to me. But guess what, when the new wears off they're going to see the real you and the real company anyway.

When you're not in the honeymoon phase anymore they're going to see it anyway and they're going to want to leave or be very frustrated or you'll be very frustrated. Because no one showed up as their true self in those moments. It was just like the honeymoon phase, the rose colored glasses. And that's not helpful to anybody. So maybe because you weren't being authentic you didn't set proper boundaries. You allowed clients to call you maybe from the very beginning on nights and weekends, or a contractor to do that because you weren't being authentic.

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And so you allowed them to really not have any boundaries but now you don't want to do that anymore. You're like, "The honeymoon phase is over, I'm tired of them calling nights, and weekends, and during my family time." But the problem here is I wasn't honest with them. I didn't tell them how we really work. And it can be very problematic. So when you have not been truthful and authentic on the frontend, does the client relationship go well long term? Of course not. Either you, or them, or both end up super frustrated, the same with the team member.

Authenticity would look more like you telling the potential clients before you even let them hire you that you don't work nights after 5:00pm or weekends, no exceptions, and neither does your staff. So you would love to work with them but you just want to make sure that they understand these are your working hours and if that's going to work for them. And it's refreshing to be authentic honestly.

And if they don't align with that, if like, no, we're going to need to have access to you 24/7, and we're going to need to push this through really fast and I can't imagine that we could not have to call you after 5 o'clock or on weekends. Then you can absolutely not work with them. And whether you and the client love or hate these values, this authenticity, it's still honest and it still works.

I mean speaking of loving them or hating them, you may love or hate Chick-fil-A. I kind of have both. I don't like their political beliefs but I do really like their chicken. So because of their religious and political beliefs, and what they stand for, they're closed on Sunday for family values. And I get that actually. I don't want to work on Sundays either, but I sure wish they did. But they have no exceptions. So as much as I don't like their politics or their hours I do love their food and so does my daughter.

And we are constantly annoyed that it seems the only days we really, really, really wish we could have Chick-fil-A is on a Sunday. But we're 100% clear on what they value. They value church and family and they're closed on Sundays. So as much as we want the chicken, and us and all the

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other people, they could be making another billion dollars a year on just from being open on Sundays, they draw a hard line there. That is their value.

And I hope you noticed in the above example, I said you and your team don't work nights and weekends. It's not like the boss is just off at Chick-fil-A, nobody in the whole company works on Sunday. When I gave that example of if you were being authentic and saying to a potential client or even a potential team member, "We don't work nights after 5:00pm or weekends." It's you and the team. If you're going to really have a company value of authenticity or as mine is, honest and directness, then what's true for you must be true for the whole company.

And I see a lot of leaders wanting to have perks just for themselves but not really wanting to have the same for their teams. They personally value freedom but for the company they put profit over people. So they really want their team to do not as they do but as they say. And they wonder why people don't want to work for them later or why they don't stay long term and why they all have burnout.

Or possibly just won't have so much lack of trust or respect for the boss, for the team members. And it's because when you think resting is good for you as the boss but not good for the team and you don't have their back, that's not being authentic. That's not being kind, if kind was your value. That's putting profits before people. So again, if you aren't willing to show up that way then don't select something like authenticity as your value. Maybe pick hard work instead of authenticity or honesty. We work hard.

So when your people have to work really long hours and nonstop day and night at least they shouldn't be surprised because you're like, "We value hard work no matter what, or we value profit no matter what." Own whatever it is you value but just be honest. And so often people want to say one thing and do another.

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Okay, the last hypothetical one we were considering, which could be a good one, freedom is a personal value of mine, but it was freedom. So one of the definitions of freedom is the power or right to act, speak or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint. Sounds amazing in my opinion. So if you want freedom as one of the values for your company, is that really how you're willing to show up? Are you and your team members allowed to work from home? How about setting your own hours? Are you allowed to work the hours that you want?

Are you and your team, and your clients able to freely share their ideas? What about freely sharing their complaints, or freely speaking their minds, is that allowed? Are you giving freedom in when people can really use their vacation or plan a doctor's appointment? I see lots of companies that are like, "Well, you have two weeks' vacations but I'm kind of ticked that you're asking to use it. I mean we have a big install or a big deadline. Why are you going on vacation?" As if I gave you that to actually use it.

Or "No, you can't go to the doctor in the middle of the day, I'm sorry you're deathly ill but we've got a client installation." That is not freedom. How about how you're paying your team? Are you paying your team well so that they can feel some level of personal or financial freedom, or at least if it's not freedom they're moving closer to that because they get that they're paid well and valued? Or do they feel the opposite?

Do they feel like they're trapped? Which is the opposite of freedom, because they're in a low paying job with lots of rules, and lots of long hours, and not a lot of space to be creative. That is not freedom. It sounds like the opposite of freedom. You're like, "That's what my job sounds like, low paying, lots of rules, long hours and no space to be creative." And we do.

Are we even not free in our own business? Yet we're saying freedom is one of our values but we are burned out and tethered to this business, on the treadmill, we're here constantly, we never stop thinking about it. That is not embodying and activating freedom.

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So again the words you choose really, really matter. So I want you to think about what you truly value and how you're going to walk that talk. For my company and my team here are the values that guide us. They're phrases. And I'm going to read you the phrase and then I'm going to read you the short paragraph that we have that describes each one.

Okay, value number one, be a conscious leader. This means we are early adopters and are progressive in our thinking. We work to ensure that our intention and our impact are the same. We listen and learn more than we talk. That's how we're conscious leaders.

Number two, cultivate a growth mindset. The description of this is we are open-minded and eager to grow. We encourage awareness and questioning and do our own internal work until we're clear on a topic. We choose our commitments carefully and we believe that they are possible. We believe we can make a difference and we believe we can do hard things. So that is our growth mindset.

Now, our team members don't have to remember these whole paragraphs. We're not testing anybody but we talk about them so much, they know what they are. So be a conscious leader, they know that, cultivate a growth mindset, they know that or even have a growth mindset, the same thing to us. Are you having a growth mindset? Are you being close minded here?

The next one, number three is be honest and direct. This means speaking up when we see something happening that's not right or being honest and being willing for someone to be honest with us. We choose honesty over drama with clients, team members and ourselves. That is a major guiding line for us. Any time we have the opportunity to move into drama we catch ourselves and we say, "No. What are the facts here?" We move into honesty over drama with clients, team members and ourselves.

Number four, advocate for justice. This means we regularly examine our beliefs and we challenge them and educate ourselves on social justice, climate, environmental and human rights issues. So that can be in our

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company and outside of it. We make sure that we're not harming the climate with the work we do. We make sure that we are honoring humans fully in our company. But we also globally and publicly take a stand on a lot of these issues.

And then our last one is reveal beauty in the world. We are creatives, we are designers. And so we knew that we wanted a component of beauty in what we value. So we didn't just say create beauty in the world, which we could do. We decided reveal beauty in the world because we do this as the paragraph describing it says, through our interior design work but also through promoting and encouraging other creative entrepreneurs, and through amplifying all voices.

Which means in our social media, we share other beauty created by other people, diverse people, all different kinds of people. We reveal the beauty they're creating in the world on our social media.

So it sounded like a lot but these are just one or two sentence descriptions. And when you see them, and see them on our website, and then see how we show up and act, you can really understand how we're embodying these and it's actually happening with our team. And the exciting thing is that every week something comes up around these values, it truly does.

In the last few months alone we've had all kinds of examples, like a team member that came to us and said, "Hey, have you noticed that our company employee contract doesn't really align with our conscious leadership piece and how we say we show up. Because it says that each employee will work a minimum of 40 hours a week." But we talk a lot about how being a conscious leader means that we don't want people working nights or weekends or overworking.

And so maybe our company contract, our employee contract should say a maximum of 40 hours a week. Just so exciting to think about because they were right. We were saying one thing and doing another. We also had a team member decide that their own Halloween costume wasn't really

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representing our values. And they did it outside of work and we don't police or regulate what people do outside the company.

But they decided they wanted to come to tell us and say, "You know what? I did this thing outside of work, I posted on my social media. It could have been misconstrued as insensitive or cultural appropriation." And I'm not even sure that it was but I loved that they were deeply and personally aware of this work we're doing in our company, for being a conscious leader and advocating for justice which has a lot of the diversity, equity and inclusion work we do.

And they were able to say, "You know what? That made me think about this choice I made. And I'm not sure I liked it. I don't know it aligns with the company." And she really said, "And it doesn't align with my personal values and I want you to know." An interesting thing was we learned so much as a team because we're like, "Let's study that. Let's see if that is a problem, if someone could be harmed by this." Because we want our intention, our intent and our actions to line up, our intent and our impact to line up as we say in our paragraph about being a conscious leader.

And so we all learned from it. And we were able to say, "Is this something that we might not have even noticed if we had done it? But now we know. Now we have an awareness." So cool. We've also had team members use words accidentally and I'm sure I've done it myself. Sometimes we notice it, sometimes we don't. That could seem culturally or even racially insensitive at some level. We're not using major slang racial slurs or anything like that.

But one of our members, one of our coaches at one point said, "Don't be a slave to your calendar." And the minute she said it she was like, "That is not a word that I want to use. That doesn't feel right." Sometimes we use the word 'master', master bathroom, mastering a topic. And I'm not saying that we have to be so nitpicky and we're not. We're not saying, "I heard you say this word, you need to apologize."

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But if when practicing and embodying these values one of our team members comes to us and said, “Have some awareness around this word I’ve used sometimes.” I’ve done this myself, I’ve heard myself say crazy, that was crazy. I don’t like the word ‘crazy’ anymore. It’s not aligned with my beliefs about people who are neurodivergent, or groups of people who are neurodiverse. So I’m wanting to eliminate the word ‘crazy’ from my vocabulary. It’s so easy to say it. We say it all the time.

So now that we’re doing this conscious value driven work, we catch ourselves and we’re like, “I use that word ‘master’ or ‘slave’ or I said crazy or something else. And I feel out of alignment with our company values and my personal values.” And we’ve even had team members ask if they could apologize to the community or maybe just the members who were on a particular call just in case someone was offended.

And they’re willing to show up and not feel shame and blame, and not feel like they’re in trouble but say, “Hey, I noticed this thing, I have awareness about this thing and if that offended someone here I want you to know that I’m sorry about that. And that’s a word I’m going to work to eliminate.” This is the way we want to show up in the world. This is the way we want to show up as a company and a culture. And I could not be more proud of my team for how we’re doing this work.

So just to be clear, we aren’t being rigid. We’re not policing the team in a rigid way. We’re just practicing our values as a group and it makes everyone so much more aware and conscious of how we show up and how we try not only to make a difference but to do no harm, particularly that line again where we say in our value about being a conscious leader where we say making sure our intent and our impact are aligned or are the same. That is really important to us.

And sometimes our intent or our intention was not to be harmful. But as in these examples I’ve shared with you, sometimes we’ve realized that we might have been. And that’s where we try to get back in alignment and we own our mistakes, or we own our actions and say, “Hey, this happened, if

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that was harmful to someone in our community we want you to know that we know about this and we're talking responsibility. And we're sorry. And this is what we're doing to fix it."

So none of us at the company are self-righteous, not a single one of us are pointing fingers. We're typically not pointing at each other. We're mostly using this to look at ourselves as a group. We don't shame and we don't blame each other. But we're all doing the work together and we're all humans first, and team members second. So it's actually a joy to grow, and learn, and walk alongside these other incredible women that are in my company doing this work. It feels so good.

We use our values and we use them every day. We also use them to have fun and give back. We have the whole team right now voting on giving some money to charity on Giving Tuesday, or Wednesday, or whatever is coming up. And we've decided to give \$1,000 and we're all voting on which causes we want the money to go to. Do we want it to go to one cause or two or three? And everybody's voting. And everybody gets to feel like they gave the money, not just me.

I don't get to be the only one who feels warm and fuzzy over the company contributing to other people in need. They get to feel it. And now we're setting goals for what we want that amount to be. We want it to get big and juicy and give it to amazing people that need help and we're doing this together. It is so fun.

We also have part of our diversity, equity and inclusion plan, we have a policy where we pay our whole team twice a year for a full day to go and volunteer and be a paid workday but we're out volunteering. So we do that as a team and we're doing it this month. I think it's next Friday or so after I record this. And even though we all live in six different states, we're volunteering at the same time. And we have shared with each other where each of us are working and what we'll be doing.

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We're going to take some pictures of it, we're going to share it with each other with our social, with our communities because it feels so fun to give back together. And by the company paying the team to get to be off work and give back, we're helping people even meet one of their own personal values, where they might not have time to do that on their own. Or they might not feel like they could take a vacation day to do that.

We are giving them sort of a no excuse opportunity to say, it is required because we're paying you, we're all doing this together. But nobody's upset about it. We're so excited about it because we all have a commitment to giving back more, which is really, really fun. And so the value, our values that we use the most, is probably being honest and direct. But you've seen conscious leadership come up a lot in these. You've seen have a growth mindset come up.

You've seen even advocating for justice and how we talk about stuff, revealing beauty in the world, revealing other beautiful charity organizations which we will be doing, in the world and the work that is happening there. But I would say the one we use day-to-day all the time at every moment is being honest and direct. And we use it daily to tell each other the truth.

One of our team members at one point came to us and said, "You know what? I feel left out because you all didn't share with the whole team some of the company initiatives and the diversity work that we're doing. And I had to learn it through a friend who listened to it on the podcast and I felt kind of embarrassed. I felt kind of silly that I didn't even know this cool thing that the company was doing. And if I'm being perfectly honest, kind of hurt my feelings. I felt left out."

And she came to us and told our leadership team. And we loved it. That's being honest and direct and we of course apologized. And secondly, said, "You're 100% right." How can we build this kind of a culture and be excited if we're not even – well, the left hand isn't talking to the right.

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So we immediately started after that having weekly Monday 30 minute kind of standup type team meetings, super quick. But everybody comes to the meetings, everybody's required to, but we just get on the same page, and we laugh, and have fun, and do an ice-breaker and connect, and hear about each other's lives, and weekends, and days. And then we go around and we talk about what we're doing in the company and what we're working on so that everybody can feel a part of it and can celebrate their colleagues and be proud of the company.

You all, this was a gamechanger and without the value of honest and direct this team member would have probably never said a thing. She might have just been resentful, and sad, and chalked it up to the one of the ways that she didn't feel included. And it could have ultimately been something that made her not want to be here long term.

But because we truly live our values, truly living by real meaningful, actionable values like this day-to-day, the result is we have a company culture that is priceless. You could not buy this if you wanted to. You can only act your way into this type of company culture. And I hear designers and entrepreneurs all the time asking me, "How do I get my team members to care about my company like it's their own?"

And I tell them this, "This is it, create a company culture starting with knowing what you value and living by them. This is how you do that, you make them, the team feel like it is their company too by living these values in this way." And we consciously wrote our values and started embodying them including discussing how we wanted to shift it from a me to we company. Meaning that it's not just Tobi's company, but it's our company. And we consciously talked about that and said, "How would you feel like this is our company?"

And when they really get to have the perks, and the benefits, and the freedoms, and the autonomy, and get to go do those paid volunteer days and help decide where our money's going. And get to be completely honest about their feelings and be human first, all of that stuff, that is what really

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creates this company. And it says that what they want is what I want. Their values and what they want are similar to what I want for the company.

And so when we act in a way that they get those same benefits or a lot of the same ones that I get, then they do feel like it's their company and they treat it like it's their company. And it creates immeasurable joy for them and for me. And I'm sure off the roof profits, because I've got to tell you, we're more profitable than we've ever been.

And the goal here for us was not profit. It was connection, it was joy, it was health, wealth and joy as we say in our tagline for our company, not just our clients but our team too. And we did this by embodying these values. And it is truly immeasurable, the results we've created. I really, really hope you will try this in your own company. And just know it takes time.

So take a look at your values and if you want help to create your values, you want to do this work with someone stay tuned because we're going to open up the doors to our Millionaire Mentorship project again in just a few weeks. It's a program, Millionaire Mentorship program. It's our kind of second tier, past Design You program for entrepreneurs that are in the mid to high six figure and moving towards seven figure business.

And it's called Millionaire Mentorship but it's not just about money. It's helping you create a company that will sustain a million dollar business and million dollars of growth exactly like I've talked about here today. And one of the things we do in that program is help you really dial in your values and start to live by them. So if that's something that is really exciting to you, if you're totally inspired by this episode stay tuned, you might want to join us in Millionaire Mentorship.

So if you want to know more about that program or if you even don't want to wait, you're like, "Tell me now", just DM me. DM on Instagram and say, "Tell me more about Millionaire Mentorship." And we can start to have a chat. But it's a place where we do this exact kind of work to help people create cultures, and teams, and success that feels truly next level, not just

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in profit, but in joy, and in freedom, and in all the things that we've talked about here today.

Okay, I hope you love this episode. Was kind of more like a lesson, wasn't it? Was kind of more like a training but I just have to tell you it is just one of the most rewarding things we've ever done. And so I hope that it will be rewarding for you too, that's what I have for you today.

And I'll see you back here next week with a very exciting episode that's actually related because my whole team, all my full-time team members are actually on that podcast episode with me and we're talking specifically what it's like to be part of our values driven team. And what it feels like in real life to be part of our company culture. So if you want to hear what it feels like in action from them and not me and how we've embodied these values as a team then you definitely don't want to miss that episode.

So I'll see you back here for that one, one week from today. Okay, that's what I have for you friends, bye for now.

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