



ACTION STEP

TURNING VALUES INTO HOW YOU ACTUALLY WORK

Values are most powerful when they are more than words on a page. They provide a shared understanding of how people work together, make decisions, navigate challenges, and hold themselves and one another accountable. Values become especially important during periods of change. A merger, a leadership transition, or a stretch of fast growth disrupts how people are used to working together, while also opening a rare window to reset an organization or team's culture on purpose.

But values only work when they move off the page. A value everyone nods at and no one can define does not change behavior. Common value words like trust, respect, collaboration, and transparency mean different things to different people. Bringing values to life means getting specific about what they look like in practice. For example, what does trust look like in a leadership meeting? How does collaboration show up when there are competing priorities? What behaviors demonstrate respect? How can a team recognize when it may need to reconnect with one of its shared values?

THE OFTEN FORGOTTEN COMPONENT OF CREATING SHARED VALUES

Creating a list of values as a team generally feels productive and leaves people feeling energized. What happens next is much harder. Values create actual value only when they translate into shared behaviors that have clear expectations and accountability mechanisms.

Most teams tend to skip determining what shared values look like in practice, treating the creation of value words as the finish line. This is why so many value statements end up listed on a website or framed on the wall, but in reality are unknown or ignored.

Defining what each value looks like in behavior is the key second step in the values creation process. Build this step in from the beginning to help avoid having to come back again and again when you find that team behavior doesn't shift because you don't have a shared understanding of how your values translate into your day-to-day interactions.

WHAT A STRONG VALUES PROCESS LOOKS LIKE

A values process that sticks moves through a clear arc, beginning with a shared purpose. It draws on the team's real experiences of working at its best and builds toward the future the team wants to create.

At DFA we facilitate this process using a story-based approach and our Me-We-Us model, which moves a group from individual perspective, to team need, to organizational impact:

Me: *What matters to each person individually?*

We: *What does the team need from one another?*

Us: *What does this group want to make possible for the broader organization?*

Done well, the values emerge from the group's own experiences, which is what makes people genuinely own them.

WHERE TEAMS GET STUCK

A few patterns tend to show up again and again:

- **Values stay abstract.** The team agrees on words but never defines the behaviors behind them, so nothing changes.
- **The list is too long.** Everything becomes a value, which means nothing is.
- **There is no follow-up.** The team names values once and never turns them into a shared understanding of what they look like in practice.
- **No one owns the work.** Without a person to shepherd this work and a regular rhythm to revisit the values, they quietly fade.
- **Accountability is missing.** The team never agrees how it will recognize the values in action, both in terms of when they are present and when they are missing.

TAKE ACTION

Set aside dedicated time with your team to work on values. Start by naming why this work matters for your team at this moment. Get people talking about when they have seen the team at its best and what their vision is for the team in the future.

From there, get as specific as possible. For each value, a team needs a shared picture of what that value looks like in practice, how it will recognize the value when it is present, and how it will know when it has drifted.

Close by asking each person for one concrete commitment: **“I will demonstrate [value] by [action].”**

Document your decided-upon values, the behaviors that define each one (both when they are present and when they are not present), and the commitments each team member made. Name someone to carry the work forward, and set a regular rhythm to revisit the values and whether they are showing up or not.

WANT SUPPORT PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE?

Values work can be especially powerful during periods of change, when teams are reconnecting around what matters most and shaping how they want to work together moving forward. DFA can help you facilitate these conversations and translate shared values into behaviors and commitments that can become part of your culture.

- **Strategy Session:** Each member organization receives an annual one-hour strategy session. Use it to explore where values could support your current priorities, assess whether your existing values still reflect the culture you want, or connect values more intentionally to behaviors and accountability.
- **Policy Review:** Members can submit one policy, framework, or initiative each year for feedback. This can include team values, behavioral definitions, culture frameworks, leadership expectations, or accountability practices.

- **Advisory Sessions:** Champion and Leader members also have access to 8, 30-minute and 4, 30-minute advisory sessions for ongoing support, respectively. These sessions can be used to think through values discovery, refine behavioral definitions and commitments, and brainstorm how to embed values into meetings, decisions, and everyday practice.

We're here to work alongside you to turn shared values into shared behaviors, and to build a culture where people understand what you stand for and how it shows up in practice.