7Geese

Core values 101

core values
are your identity

If you want people to be happy at work, your work culture must emphasize that people can be themselves. When teams feel confident in who they are and how they get things done, it means strong core values are at the core of culture.

Core values are one important aspect of creating a strong culture. A culture that influences business success. Core values are who you are, who you want to become, and they are why new hires and customers choose you.
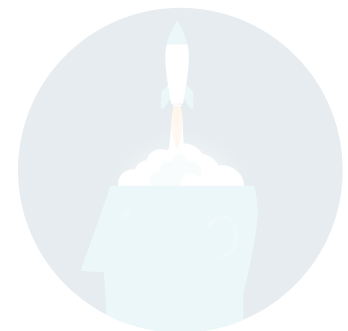
So how do you create the right conditions for a great culture, as defined through core values...?

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the importance of core values

Core values represent your team identity–the principles, beliefs, and philosophy that drive your business.

Values that represent your team aren't searched on the internet. It's not set it once and forget it. Core values need to come from reflecting on who you want to identify as, as a team.

Strong values also speak to where you want that identity to go in the future. This identity is the foundation for your team culture.

core values are your team's "signature" strengths-a unique strain of DNA that make up the "real you"

Core values align your team and future hires around specific, idealized behaviours. Since core values are unique to you, they also help differentiate your brand from others.

In the minds of your customers or partners, core values are why they choose you.

Identifying your core values starts with discovering who you are. They target what you stand for and the framework that informs decisions you make.

They define the beliefs that are unique and fundamental to your business and team. They give you a voice, unique to just you.

Strong values empower teams beyond just discovering technical competencies. With strong values, strategies become guided by a unified identity—a north star.

To move beyond just stating values to actually living them, teams have to focus on living values in everything they do. That means even when decisions are tough.

values need to move beyond generic statements to guide behaviours and influence strategic decisions

People don't look to business websites for clues on how to be successful or how to behave. They look to their peers. This is why clear core values matter.

Core values make the best qualities in team members even better. When joining a team, most people aren't just looking for the place that has the most perks. They want to join a team that's going to help them learn and improve—a team that values growth.

If you were to ask your team, "Do you believe our organization makes you a better person?" what would the results be? It's important for team members to show how they're living what the team values. It's also important for the organization to show what it means to belong to their team.

Values are how you hire.

Hiring an individual who best fits your team culture is more important than just technical expertise that they may bring.

Your core values guide questions and interview techniques that help determine if the person you are interviewing will be a good fit. Are they able to talk with your team, collaborate, inspire, and grow as you grow? Technical knowledge can grow over time. If passion and a sense of accountability are what you believe makes up your team identity, hire based on these values.

If you're hiring on skills alone, you could hire someone who may not inspire others to live your core values. Hire people who are inspired by you and your team, and who you aspire to be.

Values are the heart of your culture.

Values become the fabric of the organization's culture —regardless of who is in charge. Hire someone who lies about their progress to "look good?" Soon your entire culture will start to mimic this behaviour. Culture becomes the behaviours you embed in your team.

Values are everything. "Drinking the Kool-Aid" is just meaningless jargon.

avoid being a generalist—your core values set the foundation for everything you do so make them truly yours

Make your values clear so everyone understands them. This means you have to distinguish above all else, what values never get compromised.

Don't generalize.

This doesn't mean one-word core values are bad. Strong core values take more than a few seconds to discover. Core values are operating principles. Make them concrete enough to not get misinterpreted in various ways by different people.

Let's say one of your values is *open communication.* What does this look like in everyday behaviors?

One actions aligned with this value might be asking for open feedback. Independent of position or title, everyone's encouraged to provide professional critique. You can ask people to provide solutions, at any level in the organization to potential problems they see.

This creates a culture of communication without fear of reprimand. By giving specific examples of how to live values, you're answering "how" to enact them. There's also assurance you're not just picking a random concept to represent your beliefs.

Non-generic values are "committable." Regardless of how tough a decision is, you must be willing to make decisions based on whether people are living up to these values. True core values should have concrete corrective actions to ensure they aren't compromised. This sends a clear message that your team doesn't just pay lip service to the values you believe in.

It's also important to understand the different types of values that exist.

Core values are who we are. Aspirational values are who we would like to be. While it's important to define who you are by where you want to go, don't get caught up in what isn't a reality. Stay on track with core values by defining who you are/want to be today, not just aspire to become tomorrow.

strong core values lead to a highly engaged team and strong organizational culture

Core values help team members pin-point appreciation. Memorable values make it easy to acknowledge peers for embodying core values, day-to-day. Everyone in the team knows that action is contributing to a strong culture.

Public appreciation also increases confidence in the entire teams next steps. Core values based appreciation highlights that values aren't just lip service. It also shows others you value their work and time.

Making victories social, and not just behind closed doors, promotes ownership over performance. It also highlights what the team as a whole believes in.

Creating a cohesive identity in a transparent way provides clarity into what it means to be a leader.

This helps create the foundation upon which you can define promoting processes. It highlights who's values are in tune with how the team already operates. This helps create a network of leaders, faster.

Core values educate your customers. They identify what you believe in and what's important to your workflows and products. If you stand behind transparency, your customers know you'll be honest and open. This creates strong bonds based on action-based decisions that can scale across your team.

Core values are key recruiting and retention tools. Job seekers are doing their homework on the identities and cultures of teams. HR shouldn't have to struggle to find a fit, let them organically come to you!

discovering and defining yours

Core values represent your team identity–the principles, beliefs, and philosophy that drive your business.

They need to come from reflecting on who you want to identify as. As a team what do you believe in? What do you never want to compromise?

values exist, whether you recognize them or not—start discovering yours to guide your business decisions

Tips about writing core values:

They should be short. Memorable and recitable off the top of your head.

Written in easy to understand language.

Write them as actions. Practical, not theoretical.

Don't make too many core values—the golden average is 3-5.

Core values should exemplify what is apart of your day-to-day. Things both small and large. Actionable is the main goal.

They are not your sales goals—it's not about marketing or selling yourself. But rather what guides you to be a rockstar at sales.

Actually writing core values:

First, start with creating a list of values that don't actually align with your team vision. Brainstorm words, statements, or concepts that are not consistent with how you work, your brand, or who you want to strive to be. It's important to have a list of what you aren't so you can identify when you're off track. Next, brainstorm what represents what your team upholds.

Write down example actions that have

taken place that uphold these values. By creating strong associations between actions and values, it highlights what it means to align to these values.

Great brainstorming starting points:

"What do I value in the people that work here? What characteristics make them unique?"

"What behaviours have my peers exhibited that I believe make a great leader?"

"What do I bring to the team?"

"What do I want my team to look like?"

"What are the values that I would want each of my peers to demonstrate."

The answers collected help you discover which values your team members are demonstrating. This not only gives great insight into what you want to continue to uphold, but also what actions you don't.

Core values are like an individual. You grow, you learn from your mistakes, and you discover new things that may alter the way you think.

Core values follow the same guidelines. They can grow and change with your team.

tease out core values from strategies and process to guide your brand identity versus guiding principles

Core values seldom change because they are the foundation to your culture. and when they do change, it's because of a significant shift in organizational culture.

On the other hand, processes and strategies often change on-the-fly. Unlike core values, processes and strategies are more experimental and iterative in nature.

Core values stay fixed regardless of the time of the year or external factors influencing strategic decisions. Changing tasks can influence process and strategy. Core values don't change with tasks. They influence the behaviour you bring when executing processes, strategies, and tasks.

Core values are not just internal to your organization. They define both behaviours driving team performance, as well as why others invest in you.

Strategies and processes involve snapshots in time that impact more immediate next steps. They are the practices and actions your team goes through to achieve and uphold your values. Unlike values, they are also dominately internal facing only.

Establishing strong core values influences future decisions that move your team forward.

check your values against tough questions to make sure they stand the test of time

Every team has a culture that reflects its lived values. To determine whether your team is upholding stated core values, prepare to ask tough questions.

Do you and everyone around you know exactly what your core values are?

Are your customers happy? Do they not just know what your core values are, but know how you are demonstrating them when you support their needs?

Do you have a great pulse on how engaged and motivated your team is?

Are actions, strategies, and decisions consistent and linked back to your core values?

Does your team trust each other? Do your managers and leadership trust their team members to delegate decisions with confidence?

If the answers to these questions show a culture other than what's reflected in your core values, the team has adopted a different set of values.

Daily actions and decisions speak louder than words, so make sure the two are in sync. But what happens next?

Stated values need to be rewritten to reflect the actual reality of demonstrated culture.

A cultural shift needs to happen to bring everyone back into alignment with the stated values. This includes a lot more tough decisions. This could include firing and hiring, new performance processes, and or workflow changes.

Complacent culture is a corrosive force in creating a great culture. If there's something that's said to be important, but what's shown in strategies and decisions is different, it creates rifts. This can lead to disengaged team members or hiring misfit values.

Creating a high-performance, values-driven culture means practicing what you preach!

create a mantra to compliment your core values—a mantra is a shortened mission statement

Simple, relateable AND memorable... signs of a good mission. A mission acts like a guiding light, a strategy for your core values. It's a defining statement that says everything about how you plan to live out your team identity. But, in less than 7 words. Easy, right?

Most missions are long winded, wanna-be inspirational paragraphs. Sentences that nobody remembers. If no one remembers your mission, how can they expect to live by your team values every day? The key is simplicity. Connect your team to your culture and values by having a short, sweet, and memorable mission to live by.

Short, 3-5 word statements that define why your values matter communicate a single idea in an easy, memorable manner. Who the organization is, is no longer a plaque on the wall. Mantras are shareable because they are concise, use easy language, and tie to the core of team culture.

Let's look at an example: Apple's old mantra, "Think different."*

This simple two word statement rallys Apple's team not just behind the product, but a lifestyle. The best thing about this simple statement is it's a long-term guiding north star. Regardless of the product getting made, the the same values get applied to guide decisions.

Missions define who you are, so that in every decision you make, you can map back to it. They are pivot-proof.

Alongside core values, a strong mission works to empower and connect both your internal team to grow, and your brand to come to life. They tell everyone what to expect, not just your internal team. Your mission should remind everyone on the team why they work here, and not elsewhere.

How do you know it's a good one? It's memorable. Here's a few other checks...

Written in easy to understand language

Specific to what you do, not your competitors or neighbors

Explain how you operate. New team member should have no trouble onboarding.

Inform the product decision you made last week as well as this week

Every team member can confidently explain how they strive to enact them.

*Apple's use of the slogan was discontinued with the start of the iMac G4 in 2002

teams living their core values

Some examples of teams that don't pay lip service to their core values. Tough decisions, things like hiring and firing, or the way you conduct performance reviews should all revolve around your core values.

Here's a few all-star examples of how to embed core values not just in your internal processes, but your brand, industry, and customer communities.

buffer

Buffer's transparency core value permeates to their brand identity

Buffer, a social media sharing tool lives their core values not just in their hiring and day-to-day process, but also in their customer facing interactions.

Here's two examples how they're living the core value, default to transparency.

When you spend your money on a subscription to buffer, you can easily see what aspects of their business are influenced by the $10 fee you pay.

(Learn more about their formula)*

Interested to know what your customer success rep is making to help you shine as a buffer customer? They've also documented and shared their salary formula and current staff wages. **

This level of transparency amplifies their commitment and effort to embrace a default culture of transparency.

It opens up their business to what most people would view as vulnerablity. But what it is actually doing is inspiring achievement. As an entire team, they're committed to pushing their boundaries, dig continuously, and for the aim of improvement, not ego.

Even when no one is noticing, everyone is committed to taking time to do the right

thing, the right way, all the time. This places tremendous trust in the team.

Demonstrating this level of transparency in their strategies and processes also creates a delightful, collaboration focused workplace.

Two words describe how buffer lives their core values: *Aggressively Authentic.*

"I think maybe this value more than any of the others might seem "too good to be true" when you think about a real-life workplace. Could everyone at Buffer really be happy every day? Well, not every day—and that's OK.

*What we can do every day is try to approach every situation with the most positive outlook and intentions, assuming the best of every person we come into contact with. And it turns out that when you do that, the rest tends to fall into place."**

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GoPro's core values inspire a community, not just their product

One of the most memorable experiences of GoPro upholding its values was in May, 2015 when CEO, Nick Woodman, held up to a college promise. Woodman returned 4.7 million shares to Go Pro as part of an oral agreement he struck with his college roommate Neil Dana when GoPro was first founded. It cost him $220 million.

This largely controversial business decision spoke to the highest level of integrity. *Integrity Always*, one of the six GoPro core values. Years later, Woodman upheld the most important aspect of business: values.

GoPro inspires the transformation of otherwise ordinary moments to be viewed as extraodinary points of view.

Have you seen the one that was shot from the beak of an airborne pelican? "Toy Robot in Space"?*** If not, a simple YouTube search will show that each of these simple moments have garnered over 1.5 million views. But why?

Because GoPro's culture is charactered by points of view, by brevity, and by innocent moments. There's a sense of extraordinary in unlikely encounters. Why? Because it's the culture that GoPro brings to its products that inspire a community of heros in the ordinary.

The GoPro product asks its users to push a little harder. It's no longer just a product, but a culture.

Be a Hero: The premise from the start has been that you, in every way an amateur, can go pro—on both sides of the lens. Their culture isn't about just selling a brand, a concept, or a spec. As Jeff Ryan, VP of People would have it, "We're not perfect but we've got an amazing story that celebrates human passion and friendship."

A quick search on Glassdoor also shows GoPro upholds this passion and hero mantra in their new hire onboarding and day-to-day.

"Employees receive a free camera and accessories at their new hire orientation to encourage living life more outside work."

"Get 2 hours every Thursday to power off and take a paid break."

"Live it! Love it! Eat it! program where you can use your GoPro and take a break from the "stressers"… "

Learn more…
http://fortune.com/2015/05/14/gopro-ceo-woodman-promise/
*** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCAnLxRvNNc

Zappos risks losing talented people to ensure their core values are upheld

Zappos is an online retailer which sells shoes and clothing. They decided not to be an online retailer,. Instead, they wanted to be a team with the best customer service and the best customer experience there is.

CEO Tony Hsieh wanted to build a business based around a simple idea: if you get the culture right, then everything else that you need to be successful will fall into place.

Some of their core values include:

· Create fun and a little weirdness
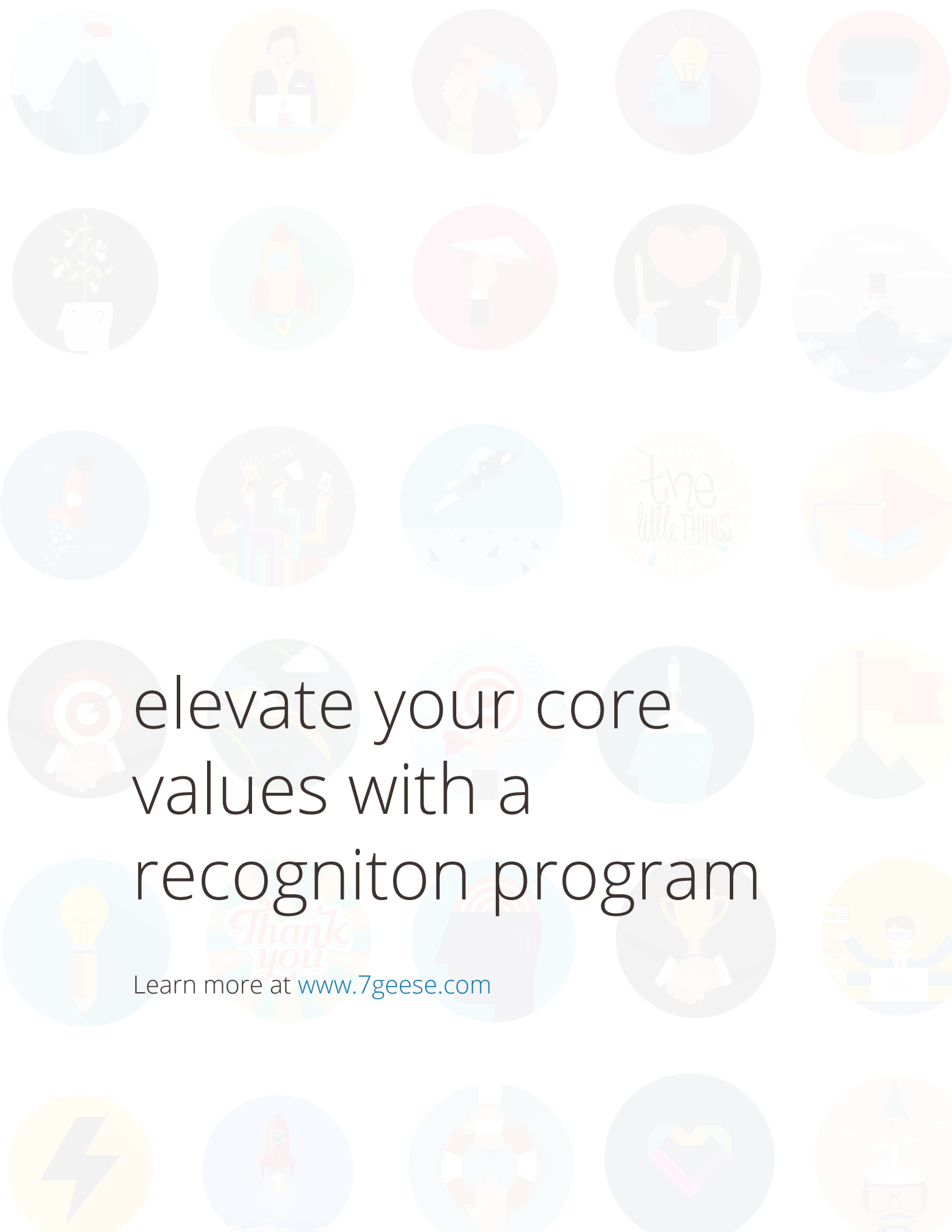· Deliver WOW through service
· Be Humble

When hiring they even risk losing smart, talented people if they bring ego to the table. Why? Because egotistical people didn't align with their core value of being humble. They go so far to offer new hires $ 2,000 to quit right after their first week of training. They want to be sure people have the right attitude and dont go for just a pay-cheque.

Sticking to their values in every decision they make shows they're not willing to break or sacrifice their culture. Living their culture means not making excuses. They have to believe in the vision and core values of the company. This is a great example of how culture can work for a company.

elevate your core values with a recogniton program

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