

CEO Tip September 2013 – The CEO—Provider, Guardian and Developer of Values

by Guido Quelle

At a managerial board meeting for a professional association over ten years ago, I—myself an honorary member of the board—put forward an idea for a project: Entitled "www - Werte Wandel Wirtschaft" (German for Values, Change and Business), the goal was to investigate how values were changing in business, how people's understanding of values was evolving, and which frameworks of values were most relevant at the time. Another member of the board was thrilled with the notion because, as he explained, values were a very important factor for companies, just think of "shareholder value, level of added value creation and so on." I couldn't help but be somewhat at a loss, as he had obviously missed my message, confusing quantitative values with qualitative ones.

These cases of mistaken identity happen all too quickly. Of course quantitative and qualitative values are both important for companies; in fact, they are vital. But what I meant were the "soft" factors of business cooperation, as well as the borderline areas within which values can be expanded on or interpreted. That's also the focus of this month's CEO Tip.

As a CEO, and regardless of whether you are a salaried top manager or an entrepreneur, you have three roles in connection with your company's framework of values: You are a provider, guardian and developer of values.

1 Provider

You are a role model, like it or not. Actions you take that lead to success will be copied and imitated, regardless of whether or not they are in keeping with your company's framework of values. As such, through your own conduct you provide values, because you add the values you yourself believe in and practice to your company, a key creative responsibility. You expect punctuality? Then surely you yourself are always on time. You demand honesty? Then you won't allow yourself to tell lies, not even white ones. Role models set new standards.

2 Guardian

As a CEO you are well advised to always keep your company's values in mind, and to above all protect those values that are conducive to growth. Maintaining good relations with your suppliers has always been a key value? If so, don't just throw it away if you don't have to. Saving a few cents on purchases is not reason enough.

3 Developer

Your position as a role model also means that you add new values if you feel they are necessary. These could include equal pay for men and women who hold the same position and have the same qualifications. And be sure to transform those values into concrete actions. Communicating values is also part of the CEO's leadership portfolio, as doing so ensures that corporate values are clearly adapted and evolved.

As the CEO, you hold the reins. Seize the opportunity to make sure your company will continue to enjoy a solid foundation of values in the future.

By the way: The project mentioned earlier was a thorough success, as the topic "changing values" moved many business leaders to take part in the study. Maybe an internal study would be a good idea for your company, too?

Prof. Dr. Guido Quelle
Managing Partner
Mandat Managementberatung GmbH
Emil-Figge-Straße 80
44227 Dortmund