

# Core Values Exercise

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Values form the foundation for how you work and lead together. In the IDEA system, values sit at the base of the Purpose hierarchy—they are the beliefs and principles that shape every decision, hire, and trade-off. Real values aren't aspirational slogans. They are the non-negotiable commitments you will defend even when it costs you.

## The Test That Matters

**Would you fire a top performer who repeatedly violated this value?**

If the answer is no, it's a preference—not a value. Real values have teeth. They cost you something. That's what makes them worth having.

## Step 1: Surface Your Candidates

Identify 5–8 candidate values. Draw from what's already true about how your best people work, not from what you wish were true. Answer these prompts:

**Think of a moment when your team was at its best. What behaviors were on display?**

**What behavior would cause you to lose trust in a team member, even if they hit their numbers?**

**What do people notice about your culture within their first two weeks?**

**List your 5–8 candidate values:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_

## Step 2: Filter to 3–5 Core Values

Apply the test to each candidate. For each value that survives, define what it looks like in practice—because a value without a behavioral description is just a word on a wall.

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| <b>Core Value 1:</b>                   |  |
| What it looks like when we live it:    |  |
| What it looks like when we violate it: |  |
| <b>Core Value 2:</b>                   |  |
| What it looks like when we live it:    |  |
| What it looks like when we violate it: |  |
| <b>Core Value 3:</b>                   |  |
| What it looks like when we live it:    |  |
| What it looks like when we violate it: |  |
| <b>Core Value 4:</b>                   |  |
| What it looks like when we live it:    |  |
| What it looks like when we violate it: |  |
| <b>Core Value 5:</b>                   |  |
| What it looks like when we live it:    |  |
| What it looks like when we violate it: |  |

## Final Check

- Are these values already visible in how your best people behave (not aspirational)?
- Could you explain each one to a candidate in a job interview?
- Would you make a hard call—including letting someone go—to protect each one?
- Are they distinct from each other, or are two really the same thing?
- Do they feel true to your company specifically, not generic?

Values form the foundation for how we work and lead together. They don't change with the market. They are the one thing you take with you through every stage of growth.