

## Background

### Putting your values to the test

Here are four core values of a very famous company. See how similar your company's values are:

**Communication:** Employees need to spend time talking to each other and to listen carefully. Information should move between people because that will move people and new ideas.

**Respect:** You should treat others as you would like to be treated. Our company does not put up with treatment that is abusive or disrespectful.

**Integrity:** Our company works in an open, honest, and sincere way with clients. If we say we'll do something, we'll do it and if we can't, we'll say so.

**Excellence:** We aim to provide the best in everything we do and we will always try to exceed our last job – we want to discover how good we can really be.

Do the four values outlined all sound familiar or the kind of values any company should aspire to? Before you answer, you probably ought to know that this particular set of values is based, more or less, on the values of the company Enron. Now, if you happened to be living at the South Pole in 2001, you might not have seen the news story which dominated the business world that year: Enron was one of the world's leading energy companies, employing 22,000 people, with a turnover of over one hundred billion a year. Overnight, the company collapsed in a huge scandal involving accounting fraud and corruptible business leaders. Nowadays, the word Enron has become a byword for the very worst in corporate greed. The moral of the story is that you can have all the values and mission statements in the world, but if you aren't living by them, then they aren't worth the paper they are printed on. It's enough to make you question any company that claims to have 'values'. In fact, a month rarely passes by when there isn't another news report exposing a company that is not living up to its so-called core beliefs. The effect is that we start to question every company lauding its

moral values at us, from the oil company claiming to help the environment to the clothes shop insisting that the cheap labour in developing countries that sew their T-shirts are living and working in excellent conditions.

Public cynicism and doubt about hearing the words 'values' and 'business' in the same sentence are an understandable reaction following the likes of Enron, but there really are some companies who strive to live up to their values – in some cases they are the absolute \*cornerstone of their success. Take the company Patagonia. It sells outdoor and adventure sports clothing. It was originally set up by a climbing enthusiast, Yvon Chouinard, in 1972. Every year the company donates 1% of its sales to the protection and restoration of the natural environment. It is involved either directly or indirectly in a variety of environmental projects including one to buy, protect, or restore land in the Patagonia region. Others have included reducing truck pollution in the Alps, conservation of trout, and the recycling of garments. It even has a website called The Footprint Chronicles which explores the company's work, including analysis of its environmental impact on the world and its supply chain. Cynics might say that all this equals good marketing for Patagonia, but as yet, no one has found any reason to suggest any insincerity on the part of Patagonia, and it's able to back up its publicized values with hard evidence. The point that the Patagonia model teaches other companies is that success comes with the alignment of your company values with those values you expect your customers to share – in this case, appreciation for the natural world and the environment. So perhaps the best starting point to test your values is to ask yourself: What are the values of our customers? How do these align with our own set of company values? If you can't answer these two questions, then perhaps you need to rethink either your values, or even perhaps your \*customer base.

#### Glossary

\*cornerstone = something important which everything depends on

\*customer base = main group of regular customers / target market

## Exercises

### 1 Read paragraphs one and two of the text. Then discuss these questions as a class.

- How similar are the four company values in paragraph 2 to those of your company? If your company doesn't have written values, are the values in paragraph 2 the types of values you would expect in your company? Would you add anymore?

### 2 Now read the rest of the text. Complete sentences 1–3 about the text with answer a, b, or c.

- The example of Enron illustrates that ...
  - all companies with values need investigating.
  - having defined values doesn't guarantee that a company lives by them.
  - defining company values is a waste of time.
- The author thinks that the cynicism many people have about companies claiming to have values is ...
  - out of proportion.
  - the result of bad journalism.
  - not surprising.
- The author believes that Patagonia's values have contributed to its success because ...
  - its activities reflect its values.
  - its values are the same as its customers.
  - Both answers a and b.

### 3 Complete the sentences with the correct form of the word in brackets. You will find the answers in the text.

- Don't be so *disrespectful* to your boss! You'll get the sack. (respect)
- He's at the doctors having some \_\_\_\_\_ on his back. (treat)
- I think there's a lot more \_\_\_\_\_ in the world these days. People are very critical of everything. (cynic)
- She even goes scuba-diving in the winter. She's a real \_\_\_\_\_. (enthusiasm)
- What annoys me is the \_\_\_\_\_ of some people who say one thing but do another. (sincere)
- When the moon is in perfect \_\_\_\_\_ with the sun, you have a solar eclipse. (align)
- Cynics would say that everyone is \_\_\_\_\_ for the right amount of money. (corrupt)

### 4 Look back at the text and choose three words that you could use in your day-to-day work.

### 5 Work with a partner. Without looking at the text, work together to summarize the main points. You must include all the words and phrases below in your summary.

core values and beliefs      Patagonia      public cynicism  
 fraud and corruption      cornerstone of success  
 customer values      environmental projects      scandal      Enron

Afterwards, find the words and phrases in the text and check you used them correctly.

### 6 Work with a partner. Discuss these questions.

- What do you think is the cornerstone of your company's success?
- How well do you think your company's beliefs or values reflect those of its customers? Do you think it matters?
- How much does your company give back to the community or into ethical projects? Can you give any examples of how it does this?