

A CORE VALUE EXERCISE

APPENDIX Q

As we began working with more and more teams, we noticed a trend: It's not just the big things we face (e.g., tantrums, property destruction, etc.) that impact our attitudes toward the work—it's the small things (e.g., greetings, emails, etc.), too.

Interestingly, we've discovered that teams tend to make solid decisions when affected by major events or disruption. In contrast, we've discovered that teams tend to make less-solid decisions when it comes to the mundane. While at first glance this may seem like a good thing, it's not. You see, it is those mundane, day-to-day events we are exposed to the most. If we don't begin understanding "the why" behind those things, it's easy for us to get lost. So how do we identify "the why"? The first step will always be identifying our core values as a team.

In our hunt for core values, we have discovered a basic list of (practically universal) core values. (There are a ton of core values lists on the internet, too.) Most teams identify with one or two of these core values (if not all of them). Once the team has identified a handful of core values, the trick is to act on those core values daily. We should try and act on them when facing big, hairy decisions and even when facing the mundane.

- Ability
- Acceptance
- Accomplishment
- Adaptability
- Adventure
- Ambition
- Appreciation
- Authenticity
- Balance
- Boldness
- Challenge
- Charity
- Cleanliness
- Comfort
- Compassion
- Consistency
- Courage
- Creativity
- Dependability
- Devotion
- Discovery
- Education
- Empathy
- Entertainment
- Excellence
- Faith
- Frugality
- Fun

- Giving
- Grace
- Gratitude
- Growth
- Happiness
- Harmony
- Health
- Helpfulness
- Honesty
- Humor
- Imagination
- Independence
- Integrity
- Intelligence
- Joy
- Justice
- Kindness
- Leadership
- Love
- Mastery
- Openness
- Order
- Passion
- Peace
- Play
- Professionalism
- Recognition
- Relaxation
- Respect
- Security
- Serenity
- Spirituality
- Success
- Tradition
- Wisdom

Once you and your team have selected the core values you identify with, the team should narrow them down to the “Top Three.” We narrow them down for practicality. The goal is to activate our core values daily. As such, it’s more realistic to act on two or three than, say, 20. Once we’ve selected our Top Three, it’s a good idea to remember they’re not set in stone. You and your team can substitute and exchange core values whenever. We want to avoid swapping them out too much or we lose focus and it diminishes the effects of their daily use. Let’s work through an example to illustrate.

EXAMPLE:

Let’s say you and your team selected the following core values:

- Compassion
- Dignity
- Honesty

Now, pick a problem. Most teams run into the common problem of noncompliance. We make a demand on a student and then that student refuses either passively or actively. Most of us become frustrated with noncompliance and we attempt to threaten noncompliance with consequences or loss of privileges. Oftentimes, we go down this path without thinking.

Instead of this coercive cycle of interaction, what if we filtered our response through our core values? This exercise has three main steps:

1. Identify the problem. (In this example, our students are refusing to perform a task we have demanded of them.)
2. Reference the team core values. (In this example, we selected compassion, dignity, and honesty.)

3. Filter the problem through our core values to come up with a solution to the problem.
 - a. Compassion-based solution: “Man, working hard at school can be exhausting and boring. I totally get it. Let me help you get started.” This simple, brief approach is where the magic begins. Instead of just stating that one of our team values is compassion, we now act compassionately. Consider for a moment what this powerful act can accomplish for our team. When we address problems through the filters of our core values, we end up modeling our core values. When we do this daily, our students won’t just “hear us” talking about our values; they will witness us.
 - b. Dignity-based solution: “I can see remembering all the steps to be successful at school can be difficult. I’m going to write down the steps to help you.” The core value of dignity is based on accepting students (and all humans) for who they are. Dignity is respect in action. Dignity never assumes the worst or the best; dignity simply never assumes. Consider for a moment what this act of dignity provides you and your students. There are no arguments, no bitterness or judgment—just respect. Students will learn that they can be respected. They will always remember what it feels like to be respected.
 - c. Honesty-based solution: “Hey, running a classroom and a safe school can be hard work. I’m being honest with you; we can’t make this work without you. We need your help.” The core value of honesty cuts through all sorts of baloney. Sometimes our students or our teammates are being avoidant or dismissive. Instead of taking it personally, we can just get real and honest. Consider for a moment what this act of honesty provides for you and your team. When we’re honest with our students and our teammates about the why behind our expectations, they understand.