

Gordian values

Preface - Many companies have public value statements, but they can be hard to interpret. “Communication, integrity, excellence, and respect”¹; What do these statements convey? Presumably every company strives for excellence, so how is this a differentiator? Company values should help us choose between reasonable options. They should focus on behavior and process, not just aspirations. And unless the inverse of a value statement also makes sense (‘strive for mediocrity?’), it is unlikely to guide anyone’s actions. Values should not be ‘nice to have’ but something you’re willing to hire and fire based on.

I. Full alignment

We put in whatever efforts are needed for every single person in the company to grok and connect with the company mission. Fulfilling your role is of course important, but you should know exactly how it fits into the larger strategy, and require us to make that clear.

II. Mandate for extraordinary

Being aware of the key outcomes of your work are, we are constantly asking “Is there a way to make this outcome better?”. If there is an opportunity to make a process or deliverable more useful for the overall mission, do it without asking. Tell us what resources and support you need to make things extraordinary, including those that aren’t part of anyone’s job description.

III. Win as a team

While striving for extraordinary outcomes, never achieve individual goals at the expense of the team/company. We evaluate and reward success and failure at a team level, to train ourselves to optimize for the collective good. We nurture a supportive environment with generous praise and appreciation for others’ contributions and extraordinary efforts.

IV. Active transparency

Knowing that we are here to support each other and optimize for collective success, we communicate openly about any and all concerns. We share our mistakes early, so that others can learn, adjust and assist. We give and seek feedback independently of org charts, but in a format that reinforces detached improvement (specific concern → why bad for mission → proposed solution). We make efforts to provide all information that would benefit people who depend on our work.

¹ Enron Corp’s values.