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Lefko Group

Double-Digit Revenue Growth Through Values

Unlock the Power of Your Team

How to Build a Powerful Organization Through Principles and Values

by Mark Lefko

The Beryl Companies provides outsourced call center services for hospitals and other healthcare facilities. If that sounds like a commoditized service, it is – for most companies. Beryl, though, has used its call center to achieve growth and distinction.

For eight years, the firm has enjoyed double-digit revenue increases, a profitability five to six times that of most competitors, a customer retention rate of 98%, and an employee attrition rate that's a fraction of the industry norm.

It made Inc. Magazine's 2007 list of the world's 5000 fastest-growing private companies, and were ranked #2 on the 2007 list of "Best Small to Medium Companies to Work for in America."

HOW DID BERYL ACHIEVE SUCH SUCCESS?

Co-founder and CEO Paul Spiegelman credits the firm's culture, which is powered by four carefully chosen core values:

- Passion for customer service
- Always doing the right thing
- Never sacrificing quality
- Spirit of camaraderie

"We do a number of things to keep those values alive," says Spiegelman. "We make them part of everyone's daily life."

Using the values as a functional guide begins in the hiring process. Says Lara Morrow, Beryl's Queen of Fun and Laughter: "You can't teach people those values. You have to hire for them. We ask potential hires questions like, 'Tell me a time you showed compassion for someone even when they didn't deserve it.' We look for people who give and give and give."

Once a new hire joins Beryl, they see evidence of the values throughout the company's headquarters. The four phrases are painted on walls, inscribed on plaques, and written about in the organization's "Daily Pride" e-newsletter. Even Beryl's annual performance evaluation process includes rating employees for living up to the core values.

Where the values come up most often though, is when tactical decisions must be made. "When an issue comes up," says Spiegelman, "we say, 'With respect to our values, how should this issue be resolved?' We're always bringing the values up in conversation, quizzing and challenging people on applying and living them. It's almost a religious thing."

The company has started several programs to help its values spread. One of those programs, Beryl Cares, is a program for employees in crisis. Those in need receive money, resources and, as often as not, friendship.

Morrow, for instance, tells the story of an employee who had been in a car crash. Management, of course, was ready to provide financial

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support, but the entire Beryl community instinctively sprang into action to help.

Employees from all departments did things, like care for the injured man's cats, mow his lawn, manage his bills, and buy eyeglasses to replace those that had broken in the crash. The most interesting thing about the situation: the injured man wasn't some popular, longtime employee. He was, in fact, fairly new to the organization, and was something of a loner. Still, the Beryl community spontaneously mobilized to help him, because the culture lives the core value of camaraderie. It's easy to assume that running the firm on values has always come naturally at Beryl. That, however, isn't the case.

"I used to be cynical about values, mission statements, and plaques on the wall," Spiegelman. "I've changed. Eight or nine years ago, we went through a visioning exercise. I'm a believer in what this kind of practice can do for a company."

WHAT ADVICE DOES SPIEGELMAN HAVE FOR ORGANIZATIONS LOOKING TO USE CORE VALUES AS A CULTURAL TOOL?

"First, the basics must be in place. You need to compensate workers properly. You need to treat them with respect. If you don't have the basics and you throw a party, it will look disingenuous.

"Once you have those, you need to make the value identification process inclusive. Don't let it be driven by you as a leader. We had an open discussion with a senior group of 20 to 25 management people.

"The process should be driven externally. Bring in someone from the outside who's trained in guiding people through this sort of thing. Doing so makes it run smoothly, and shows that leadership's committed to making things work.

"Once you've selected your values and done your wordsmithing, everything must be institutionalized. You've got to start talking about your principles, and sharing stories about times that people used them.

"Remember, if this turns out to be 'flavor of the month,' your employees will lose trust immediately. You can't force it on people, though. It must build momentum on its own.

"A final point: When you have your list and start using it, listen to what people say about it. Our original list didn't have 'camaraderie' on it. But employees came forward and said, "Something is missing. We laugh together. We care for each other. That's what we're about.' It didn't take much prodding to get us to add camaraderie to the list. Once we did, we started using it as a guide for making decisions."



B E R Y L



While continuing to lead Beryl, Paul has been named CEO of the Small GiantsSM Community, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting companies that choose to be great instead of big. This role is a natural extension of his first book, *Why is Everyone Smiling? The Secret Behind Passion, Productivity and Profit*, which explores how businesses can create the kind of corporate culture that fosters creativity, builds employee and customer loyalty, and benefits the company's bottom line.

Paul practiced law for two years prior to starting Beryl. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in history from the University of California Los Angeles and a law degree from Southwestern University. He mentors MBA students attending Texas Christian University and Southern Methodist University's Edwin L. Cox School of Business as well as nurse executives in the Robert Wood Johnson Executive Nurse Fellows Program. He also is a member of the American College of Healthcare Executives and on the board of the Entrepreneurs Foundation of North Texas. For more information about The Beryl Companies, please visit www.beryl.net.