

## GET ZAPPED!

### Creating a Culture for Success

If you or someone you know loves shoes, then you've heard of zappos.com, the company that went from a \$0 to a \$1Billion company and mastered selling shoes on line. When they started in 2000, buying shoes online was restricted to men's work boots and the thought of successfully selling women's shoes on line was considered impossible. Until zappos.com created a new paradigm that opened a whole field of enterprise possibilities: since zappos.com's success, eshoebuy, DSW, and numerous other shoe companies have emerged selling shoes online. Zappos.com did for online shoe sales what Roger Bannister did for race runners in 1954 when he broke the record to run a mile in under 4 minutes. Since his "myth busting" performance, numerous runners have achieved even better results, the current record being set in 1999 by Hichman El Guerrouj from Morroco who ran a mile in 3 minutes 43 seconds.

Creating a new paradigm does not necessarily ensure continued success. Just as tunnels create new openings, they will collapse on themselves if there are not structures for support to maintain the opening and allow further digging. Zappos.com created structures for success when the founders developed their ten core values as the foundation for everything they do, from hiring and training new employees to engaging customers and vendors alike. (You can read about their inspiring journey in the book, [Delivering Happiness: A Path to Profits, Passion and Purpose](#) by Tony Hsieh, CEO and founder of zappos.com.)

Many companies have a published list of their core values; many consultants and business gurus recommend that companies establish a set of core values. Whether or not this has the desired long-term impact depends on whether the list is just on paper or if the company actually "walks the talk."

In 1983, I was the head of a branch office of a national training and development company. Among our core values were integrity and respect. The stated core values of the office determined our actions with employees, clients and vendors alike, and led to establishing two operating principles: don't mess with people's time and don't mess with people's money. So, for example, our meetings always started at the published time (no waiting for late-comers and having the on-time attendees wait;) vendors knew we had a 2-week turn around on invoices; if a customer requested a refund, the money was returned as

soon as we knew the customer's check had cleared our bank, which we checked as soon as the refund request was made. We became known as trustworthy and our reputation furthered all our marketing efforts, especially among our clients who "spread the word" and became our volunteer sales force. We also were in the top 10 (among 28) most successful branch offices in the company.

Too often, when consulting in a practice, if I ask the doctor or staff about their mission statement, someone goes scurrying around looking for it; and no one can actually tell me what it is without reading what they created (sometimes) years ago because they heard in a seminar or read in a book that they should have one. In my opinion, if you don't know the talk, you can't walk it. And if you don't walk the talk, keep quiet!

An effective mission statement should reflect the core values of the practice; it announces to the community for what you are *accountable* and for what you want to be known. In effect, it sets the expectations for your patients and prospective patients. So if you don't know what it says, yet put it up on your web site or in your promotional materials, you can be creating potential upsets by not meeting the expectations you have set forth. (Definition of an expectation: an upset waiting to happen!)

When a mission statement is *alive* the results are impressive, to say the least. For example, the Ritz Carlton created a slogan that encapsulates its mission statement: "We are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen." Anyone who has stayed in a Ritz Carlton can testify to the high level of service they receive as a guest. The Ritz Carlton keeps it alive by enumerating the standards of service, such as "greet each guest by his/her name whenever possible" and keeps training the employees through repetition of the standards.

This leads into another aspect of breathing life into a mission statement: it must be clearly and specifically defined. Saying you are committed to excellence in service sounds good, but what does it mean? A mission statement from one of my clients states, "You can count on us to always be seeking improvement in our own lives and provide a positive outlook to share with you." When you step into this practice you can feel the positive outlook...they walk their talk.

The core values of the practice can and should be the distinguishing factors for your practice. They need to be what you look for in hiring new staff, the foundation for performance reviews, and when need be,

the reason for setting staff free. To quote a manager at [zappos.com](http://zappos.com), “we coach up or coach out” based on their ten core values.

If you join [www.zapposinsights.com](http://www.zapposinsights.com), you can access their interview questions (as well as a wealth of other management principles.) Each is designed, via open- ended questions, to allow the applicant to demonstrate his/her core values and enables the interviewer to see if the person is a “match.” Zappos.com gives more weight in the interview to the core value assessment than to the prospect’s experience and education, since skills can be trained. While initially it is easier to hire someone with the right skills, the damage that can be done by hiring a skilled and experienced clinical assistant or administrator with a bad attitude or lack of integrity can be far more costly to the practice than having to train an unskilled person with the right attitude and great integrity. Remember, we were all unskilled at some time! Fortunately we were given a chance to learn and hone skills because someone saw greatness in us when we couldn’t see it as clearly in ourselves. For the most part, when you hire someone who is a “match” to your core values despite a lack of experience and skills, and you train him or her to be successful, your results are a loyal employee who grows with the practice and nurtures its growth.

The best way to develop your core values and mission statement is to have the entire staff participate in its creation, as opposed to you creating one yourself and then telling the staff what they are. People have a “stake” in what they create themselves. One way to do it is to devote a staff meeting to the process: have everyone write down the 10 core values they embrace that are work related—what would be important to them to have at work that would make the experience of work pleasant and satisfying. Values such as fun, enthusiasm and positive attitudes should not be overlooked in the effort to appear “professional.”

Then create a master list on a flip chart of what everyone wrote. Once the list is in front of them, go through a selection process of what would be the key core values that everyone can agree on.

Using those core values, write up a mission statement that includes them in sentence form. The mission statement should be engaging and spark interest in the reader. Invite everyone to write up a version of the mission statement incorporating the core values, and submit it to a designated team (2 or 3 people) who will create 2 or 3 versions to be voted on at the next staff meeting. This will help create staff “buy-in.”

Give the mission statement a place of significance in the practice, not just in writing but in actions. For instance, have someone read the mission statement before each morning huddle and staff meeting. Each week, select one of the core values on which to focus; then publically and in writing acknowledge team members for demonstrating the core value of the week. Use your imagination in making the core values alive in your practice.

Finally, I recommend that the next time you are in Las Vegas, (or if you don't have a next time, plan one) schedule a tour of [zappos.com](http://zappos.com) for you and the team. There are four a day (Monday – Thursday only) and are free; there are also extended tours for a fee, ranging from an extra hour or so with the tour guide, to half-day events. Zappos also offers other events that could be useful. You can check out [www.zapposinsights.com](http://www.zapposinsights.com) for more details.

Now go forth and get zapped!