



MOBILIZING A VALUES-BASED CULTURE IN A NONPROFIT SETTING

BY LORI BRYANT AND SARAH JONES



In 2008, two mature domestic abuse agencies merged to form Emerge! Center Against Domestic Abuse in Tucson, Arizona. The Emerge! staff and board envisioned maximizing the strengths of both organizations to reengineer the way domestic abuse services were provided to the community. They knew that to accomplish this goal in a meaningful way, they would need to secure the right team; instill a passion for innovation at all levels; and make a deep commitment to quality services, all built on the foundation of a healthy, values-based organizational culture. The vision included not only specific outcomes for individuals impacted by abuse, but also an energizing, rewarding environment for employees, resulting in retention and engagement.

The board of directors charged the CEO with bringing this vision into reality. The Emerge! team initiated a plan to prepare the organization for systemic change and long-term success.

Building an Innovative Values-Based Culture

The agency carefully recruited leaders with extensive domestic abuse expertise, a passion for large-scale systemic change, a willingness to embrace calculated risk, and a vision for individualized holistic services. Knowing that a strong culture was essential for long-term success, the newly formed team worked to create an organization prepared to engage and embrace change. While the team re-designed the domestic abuse service delivery process, they also dedicated financial resources and substantial time to building a values-based culture.

During a diligent three-month hiring and training process, the agency selected staff based on alignment with the agency culture, strategy, vision, and readiness to roll out the

new service model. Over the course of several weeks, all employees engaged in identifying the agency's values,

behavioral indicators, and expectations. As a result, everyone was invested in the outcomes. Through intensive organizational development and systems thinking training, management staff became highly qualified to drive innovative programs, creative thinking, and strategic planning guided by the newly identified values.

Each month, agency employees study the values through interactive, experiential, and reflective exercises. They use tools such as the World Café, the five disciplines of organizational learning, and experiential learning principles to ensure not only cognitive understanding of the values but also a deep personal integration.

The leadership staff spends one day a month using values-based leadership tools to make certain that all decisions, actions, strategies, and processes are in line with the stated values and culture. The leadership team members also actively utilize the Enneagram personality/motivation inventory as a tool to strengthen individual learning and increase personal insight. Each leader works directly with an Enneagram coach to identify potential blind spots that might undermine success of the team or organization. In these ways, management has created a culture of growth, certainty, and collective strategic vision in which staff teams work interdependently to achieve success.

Fourteen months after the implementation of a "purposeful" values-based culture, employee and board successes include:

- Foundation of a staff-driven philanthropy committee (93 percent of staff members contribute)
- 100 percent board member contribution rate
- 75 percent attendance rate at board meetings
- Less than 10 percent staff turnover rate

Staff members integrate the agency's values into their work and commit to creating a healthy culture. They know that "values are meant to be lived, not just be a poster on the wall." Staff recruitment efforts include values-based job descriptions and a complex written application and interview process to assess expertise and fit with our cultural values (see

TEAM TIP

Establish a process for ensuring that new hires share your organization's values and culture.



“Values-Based Screening and Interviewing”). With the dynamic organizational structure, interdependent staff roles, excellent benefits, and employee recognition and retention programs, the agency has experienced little turnover. As a testament to this work, Emerge! was a finalist in the 2010 Workplace Excellence Awards—Greater Tucson.

Revolutionizing Service Delivery

In addition, Emerge! has revolutionized the 30-year-old field of domestic abuse service delivery with a focus on individualized healing services instead of

the “one size fits all” model traditionally used in the field. The new domestic violence service model was designed over the course of 12 months. During that time, the team researched best practices from multiple disciplines, evaluated potential unintended consequences, and envisioned outcome-based results. Team members kept the end user (individuals impacted by domestic abuse) at the center of the design process. They utilized extensive design thinking principles and refrained from evaluating cost or financial implications throughout the design process. Doing so allowed them to maximize creativity, knowing that it is easier to scale back the scope of a project if necessary than to truly think outside the box.

The new individualized holistic model includes master’s level clinicians, art therapy, dance/movement therapy, yoga, pet therapy, and a dental program for individuals with compromised dental health due to abuse. With the focus on outcomes, Emerge! has seen the following results:

- The average length of stay at a shelter has doubled (the goal is to have it triple to ensure that clients experience long-term, sustainable life changes).
- Client participation in an employment training program has increased, with 93 percent of participants securing job placements.
- Client self esteem has improved, children’s services have increased, and clinical and life skills group sessions are held more frequently with increased attendance.
- In addition, the organization has designed and implemented a robust data collection system and uses paperless records to capture and analyze all data and outcomes. Doing so has allowed the organization to monitor and sustain the program successes and adjust the program or data collection immediately.

While rolling out a more robust service model, Emerge! realized a savings of \$450,000 through a comprehensive revision of all positions. Emerge! team members are certain that if they had initiated visioning with the goal of saving money, the outcome would have been a reduction in service effectiveness and delivery instead of an expansion. Using the design thinking model and beginning with the end vision in mind allowed for creativity and improvement while simultaneously reducing costs.

Additional benefits include:

- Ten facilities were integrated into seven, all of which are bilingual (an expansion of 10 beds in a bilingual facility to 120).
- Shelter costs decreased from \$110/night/person to \$67/night/person.
- Funders are pleased that the agency has combined

VALUES-BASED SCREENING AND INTERVIEWING

View a sample interview and values-based screening process.

Once your organization has collectively created a shared set of values and related behaviors, you are ready to make certain that the shared values are core to new employees joining your organization. Just as you would not consider entering a relationship with a person who has dramatically different values from your own, you must give the same care and attention to hiring and introducing someone to the organization. It is tempting to simply fill positions with the candidate presenting the most outstanding resume or experience. However, if that person does not share the organization’s values and does not fit the culture, the employee’s success—and therefore the organization’s success—will be limited.

The process of screening, interviewing, and on-boarding is one of the most important components to building a strong, vibrant, and healthy culture. An organization that does so with purpose and intention will secure employees who fit the culture. Additionally, taking time to set expectations prior to hiring ensures success for the employee and the organization. Values must be *lived* not simply exist on a poster on a wall. Reinforcing the values through the hiring process guarantees that they remain a key focus for the organization, its leaders, and its employees.

Here are key factors in creating a screening and interview program:

- Have a minimum of two formal interviews for every employee, regardless of the role.
- Set a 15-minute conversation with the candidate and a senior employee (not the supervisor of the position) to talk exclusively about culture. Doing so demonstrates a commitment to employees in all roles. It also shows the importance that values play in the organization.
- At each step of the process, ensure that all members of the interview team agree about the person’s cultural fit in order for the candidate to move forward.
- Include a writing component that asks the candidate to reflect on one of your core values. The information and level of disclosure will inform you about the potential employee’s willingness to personally reflect and learn, as well his or her level of understanding of the values.
- Consistency! Time is precious, and busy people can find it challenging to set aside time for these steps. It is worth every minute to do this process carefully and consistently—always! Any time you bypass a part of the process, you convey the message that values and consistency are not *the* most important factors in the culture and that they can be minimized when time pressures arise.

There are many ways to create a thoughtful, purposeful screening and interview process. An additional benefit of this approach is that it helps the organization leverage potential opportunities for formal or informal leadership from the new hire, beginning on his or her first day of employment.



services and is providing them more efficiently.

- Emerge! has positioned itself to apply for funding in a more competitive manner than before.
- The organization has leveraged new funding streams and earned the trust of key foundations, including the Kresge Foundation and other private foundations that are pleased with Emerge!'s proven business acumen.
- Additionally, the organization was selected as a quarterfinalist for the prestigious national Collaboration Prize, awarded for excellence in innovative and effective response to challenges or opportunities while maximizing resources.

The organization has recruited and hired a high-caliber staff and faced challenges with excitement and humor. Administrative overhead savings exceeded \$300,000, and innovative roles allow staff to both implement a groundbreaking long-term strategy and effectively manage daily operations. Throughout the process, management consistently

paid attention to timely, transparent, and thorough communication with all agency stakeholders.

One year after the roll-out of the new design, staff members are actively engaged in taking the service model to the next level. The team continues to improve, enhance, and evaluate service delivery. ■

Lori Bryant was chair of the board of directors for Emerge! during the merger. She is CEO of ScriptSave and is responsible for the company's strategic leadership, growth initiatives, and brand positioning. Lori previously held the position of chief operations officer and senior vice president of HealthPartners Health Plan.

Sarah Jones is CEO of Emerge! Center Against Domestic Abuse and is the owner of Design Thinking Solutions. She has more than 20 years of leadership experience in nonprofit and healthcare settings. Sarah's Design Thinking Solutions work has been utilized for the past 14 years in a wide variety of healthcare and nonprofit settings.