

You have 3 free stories left this month.  
Upgrade for unlimited access  
or login now.

LEAD

## 4 Signs to Identify Company Founders With the Gift of Leadership

Be vulnerable. Ask the same of others. 🔒

BY MARCEL SCHWANTES @MARCELSCHWANTES



Getty Images

Companies with purpose are often born from inspiration – an idea to introduce a new product or bridge a gap in the industry. Founders build these companies with passion and their own vision.

Once the companies start to grow, however, they often take on a mind of their own. How can executives instill those same passions and personal values in human-centric organizations, while continuing to grow?

I connected with five executives and asked those very questions. Here's what they recommended:

## **Be vulnerable. Ask the same of others**

"One key to incorporating personal values into your leadership style is being vulnerable, allowing your employees to know you as a person, not just a manager," said Kirsten Allegri Williams, CMO of Optimizely. "It takes courage to be vulnerable, but it allows employees to see your personal values and understand how they play a role in your work – and, ideally, to emulate those values if they share them."

This extends past just executives. Employees should feel the same freedom to be vulnerable. "Instilling personal values into your organization is all about allowing people to bring their whole selves to work. By doing so, you not only create a culture of togetherness and equality, but you get the very best out of your people," said Sarah Danzl, head of global communications at Degreed.

By aligning with shared values and shared struggles, it becomes easier for micro communities to blossom, where people can be their true selves at work.

## Hire accordingly

Connecting with the right people also impacts your hiring practices. Andrew Filev, SVP and Wrike general manager, Citrix, says that while this process starts with you, it continues with hiring people who embody your values. Depending on the position you are hiring for, Filev recommends searching for an easy-to-spot signal that has high correlation with the experiences and values that you're looking for.

Similarly, Kon Leong, CEO of ZL Technologies, calls hiring the right people "perhaps the biggest contributor to setting and strengthening a set of values." Leong believes that although some values may be difficult to assess in job interviews, the success rate can be increased through other means such as selecting a diverse panel of interviewers, buttressed by strong reference checks.

## Believe in your mission

"A core part of instilling personal values into an organization includes rallying employees around your mission," said Bob Segert, CEO and chairman of Athenahealth. "It's crucial for executives to remind employees how their work contributes to the bigger picture and positively impacts the company and their communities. Once you have this foundation, you can instill your values by creating a vocabulary of success that augments the richness of the mission."

This can take a variety of forms, said Leong: "Setting values can begin with a declaration of principles either through a simple mission statement – think Ten Commandments – or embedded in the company handbook."

Aligning your values with your mission was a priority shared by many. "Our company's values have been the driving force behind our success over the years," said Filev. "They are embraced by not only me, but all employees, guiding our work, enabling us to make smart decisions, and supporting our mission of helping people do the best work of their lives."

## **Use feedback to grow**

Instilling personal values into your organization means listening to the feedback of your employees. Williams advises executives to "carve out time with your teams to check in with them individually, to show that you value wellness and connection." In her experience, this can start meaningful conversations with employees with similar values, creating new forums for talking about and incorporating key values into work.

This helps the organization grow with purpose, in Filev's opinion. "As the organization grows, the values also need more reinforcement and attention," he says. "I'm a big fan of a self-sustainable ecosystem: Can you build your team and practices in a way that will perpetuate the culture?"

Filev uses these avenues to create a more cohesive company outlook: "I personally read most of the comments in our regular employee satisfaction survey – that allows our team to voice ideas on how we could jointly improve the organization. It's in everyone's power to make it better."

Workplaces continue to become more human-centric. While this growth may move past the original mission, critical values can shine through in the community you've built. By incorporating the values, feelings, and feedback of employees, the result is a more

compassionate, collaborative work environment. As Segert phrased it, "Leaders must go the extra mile to reinvigorate company culture, which stems from creating trust, building credibility, and delivering on promises."

Inc. helps entrepreneurs change the world. Get the advice you need to start, grow, and lead your business today. [Subscribe here](#) for unlimited access.

JUN 3, 2021

Like this column? Sign up to [subscribe to email alerts](#) and you'll never miss a post.

*The opinions expressed here by Inc.com columnists are their own, not those of Inc.com.*

---

#### NEWSLETTER

**Inc.**

## Today's 5 Must Reads

These are the Inc. posts you can't miss before the day is done