

Playing Rules/Core Values / Culture Statement/Guiding Principleswhatever you want to call them. What are your standards?

Your Playing Rules are the guidelines you agree to as a team that define how you play the game. When you have these in place, each player on the team can guide their own behavior in a way that creates alignment and a level of harmony – setting a foundation for outstanding teamwork.

Having Playing Rules does not eliminate friction but will serve as a framework to resolve differences.

Your Playing Rules will be a benchmark for decision making, choosing new team members, and upholding a standard that everyone is accountable to. It makes you who you are as a company and team.

Questions to guide you.

1. What are the best characteristics of your team (or individuals) that lead to your best work?
2. What values do you have that make your team stand apart?
3. What are the behaviours or characteristics that you don't want on your team? (elicit the opposite)
4. If you were looking for a new team player, what values would they have to have to be an A player?
5. If you have or had to raise children, what values would you like them to have to guide them in a successful working life.

Take your list, looking through the By George Legal lens, circle the two that you consider to be CORE. I.e. these are the two that are not negotiable and best represent in your mind, the essence of what makes the team what it is.

Note: these playing rules should not be aspirational, they should resonate with your current DNA and what makes you you (as a team).

Note 2: these playing rules/values are core to you and ones that are in your heart and soul. You willingly try to live these each day and are happy to be held accountable to these standards.

Some Examples

Four Seasons Hotels

“The Golden Rule – do unto others as you would have them do unto you”

Keith Cunningham

1. Do the right thing
2. Give it your best
3. Show people you care

Zappos Core Values

As we grow as a company, it has become more and more important to explicitly define the core values from which we develop our culture, our brand, and our business strategies. These are the ten core values that we live by:

1. [Deliver WOW Through Service](#)
2. [Embrace and Drive Change](#)
3. [Create Fun and A Little Weirdness](#)
4. [Be Adventurous, Creative, and Open-Minded](#)
5. [Pursue Growth and Learning](#)
6. [Build Open and Honest Relationships With Communication](#)
7. [Build a Positive Team and Family Spirit](#)
8. [Do More With Less](#)
9. [Be Passionate and Determined](#)
10. [Be Humble](#)

Southwest Airlines

Live the Southwest Way

Warrior Spirit

Servant's Heart

Fun-LUVing Attitude

Work the Southwest Way

Safety and Reliability

Friendly Customer Service

Low Costs

Toyota

1. **Challenge**

At Toyota, we maintain a long-term vision and strive to meet all challenges with the courage and creativity needed to realize that vision.

2. **Kaizen**

Kaizen means striving for “continuous improvement. As no process can ever be declared perfect, there is always room for improvement.”

3. **Genchi Genbutsu**

Genchi Genbutsu involves “going to the source to find the facts to make correct decisions, build consensus and achieve goals.”

4. **Respect**

Toyota respects others, makes every effort to understand others, accepts responsibility and does its best to build mutual trust.

5. **Teamwork**

Toyota stimulates personal and professional growth, shares opportunities for development and maximises individual and team performance.

Maple Leaf Leadership Values

1. **Do What's Right**

By acting with integrity, behaving responsibly, and treating people with respect

2. **Deliver Winning Results**

By expecting to win, owning personal and collective accountability to deliver; taking appropriate risks without fear of failure while challenging for constant improvement

3. **Build collaborative teams**

By attracting only the best people, serving, recognizing and rewarding their development and success; fostering a collaborative and open environment with the freedom to disagree but always making timely decisions and aligning behind them

4. **Get things done in a fact based, disciplined way**

By seizing the initiative with the highest level of urgency and energy; meeting all commitments responsively while being objective, analytical and using effective process

5. **Learn and Grow, Inwardly and Outwardly**

By being introspective personally and organizationally, freely admitting mistakes or development needs; deeply understanding and connecting with consumers and stakeholders globally as a primary source of learning and growth

6. **Dare to be transparent, passionate and humble**

By having the self-confidence and courage to be completely candid and direct; willing to communicate openly in a trusting manner; acting with passion, conviction and personal humility, especially when delivering winning results

Other Suggestions for Core Values

1. **Accountability**- Responsibility of our actions that influence the lives of our customers and fellow workers.
2. **Balance**- Maintaining Healthy life and work balance for workers.
3. **Collaboration**-Collaborating within and outside the company to give the best.
4. **Commitment**-Commitment to roll great product, service and other initiatives that impact lives both within and outside the organization.
5. **Community**- A sense of responsibility and contribution to society that define our existence.
6. **Consistency**-Be consistent in offering the best for wonderful experience.
7. **Diversity**- Respecting the diversity and giving the best of the composition.
8. **Efficiency**- Being efficient and effective in our approach to give best solution each time.
9. **Empowerment**- Empowering the employees to take initiative and give the best.
10. **Fun**- Having fun and celebrating small successes in our journey to achieve big.
11. **Innovation**- To come out with new creative ideas that have the potential to change the world.
12. **Integrity**-To act with honesty and integrity without compromising the truth.
13. **Leadership**- The courage to lead from front and shape future.
14. **Ownership** - Taking ownership of the company and customer success.
15. **Passion** - Putting the heart and mind in the work to get the best.
16. **Quality**-Giving the best and unmatched results for all round satisfaction.
17. **Respect**-Giving due respect to self and others and maintain the environment of team work and growth.
18. **Risk Taking**- Encouraging self and others to take risk for a bright future.
19. **Safety**- Ensuring the safety of people and making sure to give them trouble free experience.
20. **Service Excellence**- Giving the best and world class service and achieving excellence each passing day.

Excerpt from Jumping Off The Hamster Wheel

Playing Rules

Playing rules refer to the standards and values of your company. They are the guidelines for how you behave as a team and what you will settle for. You're Playing Rules will help determine the people you'll attract, the people that will stay, and in turn, the culture you foster. Your playing rules equal your company culture (if you uphold them).

This is the part where you get up on your soapbox and declare what you stand for. I say that in jest, but it's not too far from the truth.

You see, every business already has a culture, whether you are conscious of it or not. The question is—do you currently have the culture you want?

Culture design should be intentional. Perhaps you already have the culture you want, and if you do, kudos to you for instilling that in your organisation, even if by accident.

The true test of your culture is to know what happens when you are not there. A strong and healthy culture will permeate the company way beyond the influence of any one person. A weak culture that is dependent on the presence of the Owner will quickly unravel upon the Owner's absence.

Culture is one of the key defining factors in a company's ability to grow. Think of company culture as you would an individual's constitution. A person with a strong constitution can endure much more pressure and force than one who's constitution is weak. As your company grows, your team will experience varying degrees (and sometimes extreme levels) of pressure. Your team's ability to handle that pressure will be greatly influenced by the strength of your culture.

Case Study: The power of culture in times of tragedy.

Michael and Tara's company was growing rapidly. It had reached the point where it was getting too much for them to handle and they knew they needed to upskill. That's where they hired us.

Of the many opportunities we identified, clearly defining their Playing Rules was on the list. The team was growing and, unlike when it was small, some different attitudes were creeping into the workplace, and Michael and Tara felt they were starting to lose the tight family feel.

Luckily, Michael was a very strong leader from a standards perspective. He was well respected, he cared for his team and didn't suffer fools lightly. He was firm but fair, and subsequently, there was a strong culture base to build on.

After we'd defined the Playing Rules and infused them into the company, there was a measurable difference in the way the team worked. Some people left and others stepped up. It became clear very quickly when new hires were a fit and when they weren't. The team truly

embraced the concept.

Before long (after implementing some further systems and redefining some roles) it was possible for Michael and Tara to be away from the business for extended periods of time and when they got back, things were just as they were before they left.

Their team enjoyed telling them they'd been made redundant. And they almost had.

Then tragedy struck. Michael became critically ill, and it was clear the business needed to fully operate without him, and Tara, while she cared for him. Even though the situation was extremely unfortunate, the business didn't miss a beat. Yes, there was some tweaking to do, but the team stepped up, solved any problems and adjusted to the new reality. Michael's essence, represented by the core values he'd instilled in the company, shone through loud and clear. The Playing Rules are clearly in the DNA of the company, it's just who they are as a team.

Contrary to Michael and Tara's story, I've got too many examples of companies whose playing rules are either non-existent or meaningless. The tell-tale signs of this can be high levels of absenteeism, difficulty finding good people, low morale, high staff turnover and general lack of mojo amongst the team. I'm sure I don't need to point out why these symptoms are problematic for growth.

So, how do you go about getting your Playing Rules in place? Do you just sit down, write out what comes to mind, and the next morning declares them from the stage, 'Jerry Maguire' style? Or should it be a little more structured and strategic? To be honest, it can be either. The first step though is defining your Playing Rules—so let's look at how you do that.

Defining Your Playing Rules

Think about it this way—you've got a set of values (things that are important to you) that make up who you are. Some of those values are specific to business in general, and some apply to life in general. Similarly, each of your team has values in the same way. What we want to do is distil the most important and relevant values/rules that you and your best people live by and articulate them in a way that represents what makes your team what it's (or perhaps should be). There are really two approaches to getting this done.

- a. **Have the leadership do it.** That may be just you or you and your key people.
- b. **Get more of the team involved.** Potentially a sampling of people from each department right through to involving the whole team.

The path you choose is up to you, and I've successfully used both approaches with clients.

If you choose to do it with just you, or you and your leadership, it will be faster, and you'll get exactly what you want, but the possible downside is you may not capture something that is important to the team—and more importantly—you may not get the full buy-in and ownership that is critical for your team.

Some of the situations that warrant input from leadership alone are:

- The culture is already strong, healthy and clear. Putting it on paper is more of a formality versus a brand new initiative.
- The culture is toxic. You need to get it right, so you can create change. Getting others involved will open a can of worms and take you down an undesirable path. Note: Correcting this type of situation requires a few more steps than that of just documenting your Playing Rules.

On the flip side, if you get the team involved, it's more likely there will be higher levels of buy-in, but it can take longer, and it may not always represent 100% of what you want.

If given a choice, I do prefer getting the team involved for a few reasons:

1. The buy-in factor – if someone doesn't feel ownership around something, it just never means as much, and that gets reflected in their behaviour.
2. The process makes it really clear who should be on the team and who should not. When we've done this exercise on team days, those who aren't aligned clearly stand out. But, more on how to deal with that later...
3. Good people have similar values, and they want to see similar things in the company's Playing Rules. In the many times, I've done this exercise with clients; there are always similar themes that come out. So, the fear of ending up with something you don't want is remote.

Once you've decided on the right path for you, the next step is how to draw out your playing rules. Here are some questions that can help flush it out.

- a. If you were to ask your very best people, "What are the values most important to them that make them who they are?" – what would they say?
- b. If you were onboarding someone during their first day of working for your company, how would you guide them in their behaviour so they would be the perfect employee?
- c. If you were coaching your kid (if you don't have one, pretend) on how to behave at the playground, what would come to mind?
- d. What thoughts do you want your customers to have after dealing with your company?
How would your team need to act to leave that impression? What values would guide those actions?
- e. When your people are asked by their friends outside of work, "what is it like to work at [your company], how would you want them to respond? How would your team need to think and act for your people to feel that way? What are the underlying values that would guide that behaviour?
- f. If you were to look at some of your C & D players (see Chapter at the end of this section 'Dealing with C and D players') what is it about their behaviour that is lacking? What values might be missing there?
- g. For your company to be a leader in its field, what sort of team would you need to have?
What standards would that team strive to live up to?

Warning: Some of these questions will lead you to define aspirational type answers (i.e., what you'd like to be vs. what you are.) That is fine so long as it's not too far from where you are now. When you define your Playing Rules, everyone needs to feel they are a true representation of the team. If the rules appear to define something you are not, they will lack power. Your values must ring true. You'll be able to feel it when it's right.

How many Playing Rules should you have? There are no right answers but I've seen it work best when there are less vs. more. You want it to be easy for people to remember, so if there are 17 of them, well, that might be a tad much.

A general guide would be to have 3-5 Playing Rules.

How you write them matters. If you use generic terms like 'respect,' 'honesty,' or 'teamwork,' you might find it helpful to add some explanation to these words that reflect your company's DNA. Generic words tend to sound very 'vanilla' and consequently elicit a lackluster response from your team.

When your team read the Playing Rules, you want them to know that these come from your company. Ensure they have character and feel. Here's an example:

Case Study: Unique Playing Rules

When we began working with Simon, he wanted some help with his team. Through some conversation, it became clear his people problems were due, in part, to unclear expectations being set by him. Simon needed playing rules.

Simon's first attempt certainly got the ball moving in the right direction but lacked the punch that helped Simon and the team feel ownership over what they meant. Here was his first attempt

Ownership – taking ownership of the company and customer success.

Perhaps you can see the essence he was aiming for here, but also see it's 'vanilla' flavour. When he went back to his best people to ask them how to better phrase the concept he wanted to communicate, this is what they came up with.

You eat what you kill.

Harsh? Perhaps, but work a day in their company, and you'll soon pick up the intensity of the team. This Playing Rule makes it very clear, if you don't perform, you don't stay. Those that do stay LOVE IT - because everyone is like them and thrive on performing.

If you do an internet search on 'company culture' or 'core values' you'll get lots of examples that can give you ideas. One company that has been well documented is Zappos in Las Vegas. Investor turned CEO Tony Hsieh, took the lessons he'd learned from growing his first companies, and the cultural disasters they'd become, to form a very intentional (and well documented) culture that was exactly what he wanted.

In his book 'Delivering Happiness,' you'll learn lots of tactics and strategies of how they've done it. Some creative practices like paying people a significant lump sum of cash to leave during their orientation; and having the team write a 'culture book' each year that describes how the culture affects them. Zappos has become the poster child for modern day company culture (at least as of this writing).

The culture of your company will have a massive impact on the happiness and performance of your team. If you've got a small team, it's far easier to breed the right culture through your own leadership actions. As the team grows, you have less ability to influence each person, not only because there are more people for you to affect, but because others in your company are also influencing them.

The goal in developing your Playing Rules, and hence defining your culture, is to have everyone influencing one another the same way in terms of values and behaviour choices.

Bringing Your Playing Rules Alive

It's one thing to define your Playing Rules, but making them real, keeping them alive and embedding them deep in the organisation, is another. You don't want to be one of those companies that proudly have the Playing Rules or core values mounted beautifully on the wall, but, no one knows what they are.

Developing your Playing Rules is not a one-off exercise that allows you to check off a tick box then move onto the next thing. It's an ongoing commitment and a critical part of your leadership.

So, here are a couple of ideas for implementing, embedding and maintaining momentum:

- Be sure your Playing Rules are part of your recruitment and onboarding processes.
- Build stories (real ones) about the company that exemplify the Playing Rules in action.

People love stories, and remarkable stories get passed on. Think of times when the team went way beyond, took some risks and just blew the client's mind for instance.

- Celebrate actions that are in alignment with the Playing Rules.
- Bring focus to them through internal communications (emails, newsletters, internal documents)
- Openly talk about them at meetings (both departmental and company-wide)
- Lastly – put them up on the wall or around the workplace (see First Principle: **Error!**

Reference source not found.).

There will be times when your commitment to the Playing Rules gets tested; a time when you want to let some behaviour slide, or a difficult choice needs to be made. These are the golden moments that really bring your Playing Rules alive. Accepting the temptation to take the easy choice is a downward spiral and lets the team know the rules are negotiable. Don't do it.

Even if you think no one will find out about your choice, your commitment and persistence in maintaining the standards is the core driving force behind them. Never, ever waver, regardless of any perceived negative impact. Those perceived outcomes are always either only short-term or just don't eventuate.

We see this most often when there is a reluctance to deal with people on the team who are highly skilled but won't come around to living the Playing Rules (we call these people C players – see '**Error! Reference source not found.**' at the end of this section). The fear of the gap they will leave in the organisation if they left can be paralysing. The reality is, if they are no longer there, you'll work out a way to get the job done without them. Either the rest of the team will step up, or you'll find a replacement easier than you thought you would, or you'll even realise they weren't as good as you thought they were. We've seen this play out so many times, and can say with certainty, it's never as bad as it appears it might be.

Case Study: Standing up for the Playing Rules

Matt was a brilliant chef and ran a very popular and successful restaurant. One of his main challenges however, was some turmoil among the team. It was affecting the customer experience and people were starting to make comments to him. It needed to be addressed.

We pulled the team together for a team alignment day. During that day, one of the things we talked about was the kind of environment they wanted to work in. As with most people, they were looking for a place that was fun, supportive, had good people to work with, a place where they were challenged and acknowledged for the excellent work they did. In our experience, these kinds of themes are very common. Through this discussion the team established their Playing Rules.

During this process, it was clear not *all* the team were on board with it. Nancy (the highest performing server by average sales volumes—she was brilliant at the upsell—and by quite a margin) was giving all the body language of 'this is a bunch of BS. I'd rather be anywhere than here with these people'. Matt saw it too, as much as he didn't want too.

The day ended with a real sense of alignment. The team (mostly) were thrilled to have some clear ground rules and expectations on how things were going to be moving forward. I warned Matt that he was about to be tested on the work they had done. He knew what I meant and was nervous. It was clear Nancy was not on board, yet Matt really didn't want to lose her selling power. It was a real dilemma for him.

Like I've mentioned in this chapter, I reiterated to him the importance of sticking to the standards. He promised me he would.

Sure enough, it was not long before Nancy's behaviour towards the rest of the team continued and needed to be addressed. As hard as it was for him, Matt stepped up to the task, and addressed the behaviour. The difference this time was he had some objective benchmarks (The Playing Rules) to show Nancy where she wasn't living up to the standards they'd agreed on.

This went on for perhaps 3 weeks before she threw in the towel (literally) and left in a rage. Matt was shaking but the rest of the team breathed a sigh of relief.

And you might be able to guess what happened to the performance of the remaining team. Yep, it went up. And it went up beyond what was necessary to make up for the loss of Nancy's sales.

You might argue that was the long way around in dealing with Nancy. And it may well have been. But now the team has a clear set of standards to operate by and more importantly Matt has the tools to make sure he only brings on the right kind of people moving forward. He also has an objective reference to address behavioural issues should they arise again.

Sometimes the long way is the short way.