

Mission Ready

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Issue a Core Values Card

Not since the days of the junk bond scandals, and the Lincoln Savings debacle, has corporate America been viewed with such cynicism. The news media images of silver haired CEOs in hand cuffs have elicited in many of us a general sense of justice having been done, as well as the suspicion that we are seeing only the tip of the iceberg. High profile corruption has created a crisis of confidence among the rank and file workforces of the companies involved—not to mention the customers, the stockholders, and the lending institutions which once held these companies in high esteem.

While it is convenient to hold those who personally profited the most accountable, there is plenty of blame to pass around. Boards of Directors which pass on the stockholders' demands for increased growth every quarter have to shoulder some responsibility for creating conditions in which corporate leaders are tempted to cook the books in order to meet thoroughly unreasonable goals. The very employees whose 401K plans have now been depleted would probably have not, if given the chance during the good times, returned profits made from questionable corporate investment practices. Greed is not limited to America's executives (most of whom are honest, hard working stewards of the corporation); greed is systemic, permeating entire organizations.

Perhaps the business community would do well to incorporate a practice which exists in only one of the branches of the armed forces: the issuance of a core values card.

Did you know that every active Marine—from private to general—carries a credit card-sized reminder of the great values taught during Marine Corps training? Did you know, further, that a Marine may be asked at any time by a

superior officer (who is subject to the same request by his/her superiors) to explain, in his or her own words, the meaning of one of the core values of that great organization, such as *honor, courage, or commitment*? Woe unto the Marine who responds tongue in cheek; he/she might be asked: "What is it about *courage* that strikes you as so amusing?"

One would think that the Marine Corps, with its legendary esprit de corps, would be the last organization that would require a mandatory core values card; after all, most Marines are already inclined to be gung ho. But "senior management" doesn't want any of the great lessons learned in Boot Camp to be forgotten. As silly as it may seem to the other services (often plagued with scandals), Marines frequently stand tall and explain to a superior what the core values of the Corps mean to them on a personal level.

Corporations have core values, too, but too often the words become floating abstractions, or Madison Avenue slogans. Employees are rarely asked to explain, in their own words, the meanings of *service, customer satisfaction, or working together*. Indeed, if asked such a question, they might feel unfairly "singled out", and might even file a complaint with HR. You can rest assured no, Marine ever feels unfairly singled out when asked: "What does *commitment* mean to you?"

If corporate core values were emblazoned on the company letterhead, and on the business cards, and were considered in depth during discussion groups, the message would be communicated throughout the organization. Honesty, duty, and responsibility can be systemic, too.