SYNOPSIS

CORPORATE CULTURE PAYS OFF

How values-driven companies create profitability and happiness

MARIE ALANI & HELENA TIMANDER
CORPORATE CULTURE PAYS OFF

• How do you transition from fuzzy words and slogans to behaviors and habits that create value?

• How are corporate culture and values linked to financial results?

• How do you build a corporate culture that contributes to both profitability and happiness?

Are you wondering why you should care about corporate culture and core values or how to work with them on a day-to-day basis? Then Corporate Culture Pays Off is the book for you. Authors Marie Alani and Helena Timander have delved deep into the subject and guide their readers through interesting research results as well as concrete and inspiring examples based on extensive interviews with many corporate leaders. Leaders from selected stellar companies tell their story, share culture building habits and the importance of being a values-driven company. Marie and Helena’s research boils down to eight criteria for success that you can use as practical tools when building and strengthening your culture.

Marie Alani and Helena Timander are the co-founders of Vision Takeoff. They help companies to strengthen their brands and results through building clear and values-based cultures. They are frequent keynote speakers, workshop leaders and writers with a passion for corporate culture.

THE BOOK IN SHORT

“When I came home this last time, I had an email from Zappos asking about the shoes, since they hadn’t received them. I was just back and not ready to deal with that, so I replied that my mom had died but that I’d send the shoes as soon as I could. They emailed back that they had arranged with UPS to pick up the shoes, so I wouldn’t have to take the time to do it myself. I was so touched. That’s going against corporate policy. Yesterday, when I came home from town, a florist deliveryman was just leaving. It was a beautiful arrangement in a basket with white lilies and roses and carnations. Big and lush and fragrant. I opened the card, and it was from Zappos. I burst into tears. I’m a sucker for kindness, and if that isn’t one of the nicest things I’ve ever had happen to me, I don’t know what is.”

This is a blog post by American blogger Zaz Lamarr. The blog post went viral on the Internet through Facebook, Twitter and other social media. A fantastic PR coup you might think, but the story isn’t about clever PR. The person in customer services who sent both the UPS pickup and the flower arrangement, had no idea who the blogger was. It’s a story showing that people are able to act with both good business sense and compassion when companies have clear values that call for and encourage them to do so. Zappos is an American online company widely known for its strong corporate culture, its values-based management and fantastic customer service. The blog post “I heart Zappos” went viral in a rarely seen big way. Customers are loyal fans that wanted Zappos to start selling other products, just so they could be customers.
Employees are stars that love their job, even if it only entails answering e-mails and telephone calls, and potential star employees are lined up waiting to take part in the success story. Above all, this story bears witness to a very values-driven company and how passionate corporate culture contributes to profitability – the theme of our book.

**Why should you care about corporate culture and values?**

There were many reasons for writing this book. Primarily we wanted to prove a thesis that some might consider a paradox; companies that are not solely driven by financial values are the ones who achieve strong financial results. Companies that see a greater purpose with their business, other than making money, paradoxically achieve sound finances. The financial aspect is considered a hygiene factor needed to achieve other purposes. And having a clear purpose, having fun at work and being able to progress in your role is conducive to happy and motivated employees. Happiness and profitability are in fact interconnected.

Another reason for writing this book is to put to rest the notion that working with core values and culture are fuzzy, time consuming HR projects. When you immerse your employees in the company’s core values, the business becomes considerably more effective, attracts the right employees and customers, and transforms the organization into a well-oiled machine. Just like at Zappos.

Furthermore, we want to start a conversation about the question of values in the business sector. Granted there already is a conversation, but it’s more about ethics and morality and about how not to act. On a daily basis, we can read about greedy CEO’s, companies who cheat and poorly treated customers. We want to start a discussion about good behaviors instead and how we want to act towards others. Highlighting good examples and ambassadors that inspire rather than listing more deterring atrocious examples.

Moreover, there is a great need to start discussing values in the workplace, and the practical consequences of incoherent values. A little further along in the book we present *Sverigestudien* (The Sweden Study) that clearly shows that there is an alarming disparity between desired societal and corporate values and individual values.

And last, but not least, we’ve always wanted to write a book. We’ve plowed through heaps of literature, articles, blogs and dissertations. There is an abundance of books on corporate culture and values work describing theories, research and various models. But what we felt was missing was a practical guide on how this is practically done in the workplace. That is the book we’ve written.

**What does the book encompass?**

*Corporate Culture Pays Off* is a distillate of a voluminous and complex subject. We’ve skipped the long theoretical commentary and focused on the core – how it’s practically achieved. The book is divided into five sections that can be read independently. We hope that this will be an inspirational book that can be pulled off the shelf many times and not a book that is read from cover to cover and then stowed to collect dust. There is also plenty of space for the reader’s own notes. We encourage all readers to write down spontaneous thoughts and ideas and to answer the questions we pose.
The book also contains reference materials and suggested further reading. Because links are quickly outdated, you’ll find all information about articles, studies, authors, films and other material on the upcoming website www.corporateculturepayoff.com.

The Essence, Stellar Companies, Success Criteria, Going Global and Tools

We’ve named the first section THE ESSENCE simply because it deals with the gist of the area of corporate culture and values. This is where we lay the foundation for the rest of the book, introduce essential concepts and present a couple of metaphors that recur later in the book. But we believe that terminology and semantics tend to complicate matters and that one should focus on the following questions: why, where, how and what. You will also receive a brief introduction to a few studies that all demonstrate that values have a large impact, both for us as individuals and for companies and organizations. For instance, did you know that 67% of European companies believe values contribute to success, and that in more successful (read profitable) companies, 82% have a leadership permeated by core values? When we ask equivalent questions during our lectures 100% usually answer that values and culture are essential to becoming successful, but only 20% answer that they are fully living their values. In other words, there’s plenty of room for improvement.

The second section, STELLAR COMPANIES, is where we describe what five successful companies have done to build strong corporate culture. We have intentionally chosen companies from different fields, of different sizes, ages and ownership structures to prove our thesis: happiness and profitability are interconnected in all kinds of companies. As an additional criterion, all companies are international and present in several markets.

In the book you’ll become acquainted with these Stellar Companies; from highly creative Hyper Island to the large publicly traded company Tele2. You’ll also get to know Axis Communications, Max Hamburgers and Centigo. What unites all of these companies is that they consider themselves as being strongly values-driven and that they are highly profitable.

Our conclusion, having met leaders from these companies, is that they are all characterized by a strong passion and great courage. Courage is the basis of their success. There is a strong perseverance to stand up for their values at all times, and not to stray from what they stand for. There is also an open attitude to doing things differently and challenge established truths. Passion and courage is substantially easier to evoke when the founders and/or owners are engaged in the business, and this is also a common denominator for the companies in this book.

The third section goes under the name SUCCESS CRITERIA. This is where we introduce eight fundamental criteria for a strong and values-driven corporate culture. The eight criteria are the distillation of many interviews and consulting assignments over the past 15 years, and can be used as practical tools to work with your culture.
We can also substantiate our theories with the help of data from our partner Netsurvey, a research company that among other things conduct employee surveys. The criteria are: Vision, Mission & Values, Clarity & Consequence, Passionate Leadership, Visible & Accessible Management, Feedback & Dialogue, Involvement & Co-workership, Values-driven Recruitment and Sustainability.

The fourth section is called **GOING GLOBAL** and addresses the possibilities and challenges of internationalization. We’ve spoken to companies who are in the various stages of the internationalization process. They’ve shared examples and their thoughts on what is important to consider, from a cultural perspective, when expanding your business into new markets. We’ve asked them how it’s possible to preserve your core values and corporate culture during this process and what approach is needed when entering new markets.

The final section is called **TOOLS** and is precisely that: exercises, checklists and other tools to get started. There is a widespread misconception that culture and values work are resource heavy projects that take time and money from the business. But the aim of working with values is to create a culture so strong that the organization intuitively makes the right decisions and independently leads the company towards its vision. The whole idea of being values-driven is for the company to become a well-oiled machine, with less restrictions and complicated routines. In this section, we share practical tips and exercises that allow you to quickly start advancing and strengthening your culture.

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**HAPPY READING!**
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