

Hawaiian Values and The Workplace

Why Values Are Important

Values define our behavior, determine our relationships with each other, determine what kind of person we want to be, how we judge others or want to be judged, and set a common standard of behavior for the workplace.

The Importance of Shared Values

It is true that everyone has values. One can't help but assimilate and adopt values from others around whom we grow up whether family, friends, or other associations we form while making our way through the daily choices and consequences of our behavior. Values tend to spring from our individual ethnic cultures. These culturally driven values then drives our behavior. So, while we all may have been brought up with a set of values we are far from being on the same page when time comes to act out the values. Without intervention we have no set of commonly agreed upon shared values to guide our relationships in the workplace. So, when one value gets played against another without common understanding between two people it creates conflict. The great conflicts of the world – even the wars we fight – are not caused so much by political disagreements as breakdowns in cultural clashes over values. So, when an organization takes the time to guide their workers toward sharing a common set of values the result far less conflict, more predictable behavior and stronger relationships. Shared values insures that everyone is treated equally and with respect and helps to unify an organization - especially during stressful times. Values help the work flow more smoothly between management, staff, and employees because people know what they can expect from each other. The practice of shared values makes the workplace a joyful place to be.

Why Hawaiian Values?

Because we live in Hawai'i, it seems appropriate to engage a values system that springs from the host Hawaiian culture, renowned for its hospitality and unconditional extension of trust and friendship to all people, and whose spirit of aloha is so fundamental to the community psychic that it defines us as a people.

Hawaiian values have universal application. They mirror all the fundamental concepts of human behavior that strive to make the world a better place but they are stated in a way that makes it much easier to incorporate into the operating culture of an organization. Hawaiian values, even when stated as single words such as *aloha*, are used to express a range of behavior

expectations that take a lot more explaining when expressed in English. It's economy of expression makes it possible to develop a company behavior code that is comprehensive yet suited to businesslike efficiency.

Translating Hawaiian Values

Concepts of social, religious, and environmental stewardship were fundamental to Hawaiian life and expressed through the language as a values system. The landscape of Hawaiian vocabulary spoke to behavioral relationships not just between people but relationships between Hawaiians and their environment. People are sometimes confused when examining specific words put forth as describing a Hawaiian value because as “parts of speech” Hawaiian “values” are stated in a variety of constructions including as phrases, nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Developing a corporate operating culture based on Hawaiian values vocabulary requires skillful translation if the essence and integrity of the value is to be preserved.

***Aloha* – The Reflecting Prism**

In meeting the challenge of selecting and adopting a set of Hawaiian values one value seems to top the pyramid as fundamental to any Hawaiian values program. That is the concept of *aloha*. In all its manifestations *aloha* stands as a *behavioral belief system from which all other values seem to flow*.

Aloha has emerged as a Hawaiian cultural concept that functions as a prism through which all other behavioral values that govern relationships are refracted. *Aloha*, while having many manifestations, essentially is an unconditional extension of love, trust, and friendship giving the benefit of the doubt to the receiver. It is a particularly magnanimous cultural act in its intimacy as a personal greeting that is routinely extended to strangers which sets aside personal boundaries and welcomes the receiver into one's personal space. *Aloha* is fundamental to Hawaii's community psychic, embraced by all of Hawaii's people, and acted out routinely by the people of Hawai'i in thousands of acts of kindness, tolerance, understanding, and benevolence. *Aloha* is innate to the Hawaiian condition and seems to define us as a society.

But, *aloha* is also a call for reciprocity, *Aloha aku – aloha mai*, *aloha* given – *aloha* received. While *aloha* is extended unconditionally it does presume that the receiver is worthy of the honor and that the love, trust, and friendship extended is reciprocal. So, when the concept is manifested in its most profound state of implied reciprocity it defines the relationship between sender and receiver as accepting responsibility for each other's well being and in mutual respect. From the cultural umbrella of *aloha* many, many other Hawaiian values flow as extensions of the *spirit of aloha*. As a concept *aloha* is Hawai'i's gift to the

world. It is a universal statement that transcends race, color, or creed. Aloha is a way of life.

Making Values Operational

Incorporating Hawaiian values into the operating culture of an organization's workplace is a 3-dimensional challenge.

First is the challenge of selecting a set of Hawaiian values appropriate for the organization by engaging in an inclusive process of sorting through the long list of values and securing agreement on a manageable set of *values* statements that will become a shared responsibility of the workforce.

Second, is the challenge of codifying a set of specific *behaviors* that has the workforce acting out the values as a measurable performance?

Third, is to design a *re-enforcement* strategy that has the workforce periodically re-visiting the values program as an important part of the operating culture.

12 Hawaiian Values

There are far more than 12 Hawaiian values. The ones presented here are selected as appropriate to a fundamental values training program.

All Hawaiian words have more than one meaning and the context for its use determines the specific interpretation. Also, many words with the same spelling can have very different meanings particularly when diacritical marks, which function like an alphabet, are used in spelling the word.

The definitions used here are intended for application in a workplace environment as it might contribute and strengthen workforce relationships.

1 Aloha is the most intimate of all greetings. The unconditional extension of trust and friendship to include strangers. Taking responsibility for those to whom aloha is extended insuring their safety, well-being, and peace of mind. Also extended to places and the physical environment implying stewardship obligations as an expression of caring for the condition of such places.

2 Alaka`i is both a noun and a verb. The noun being a person who is a leader and the verb being the act of leadership by guiding or directing. As a value

Alaka`i is about a person's willingness to assume the responsibilities of leadership.

3 Hanohano is to conduct oneself with distinction, honor, and dignity. It describes a stately and regal bearing that one earns through acts of distinction.

4 Ho`omau speaks to perseverance and endurance. To be unceasing and committed to achieving a goal or completing a difficult task.

5 Ho`ohiki is about keeping your promises. It is the equivalent of a pledge or oath and a serious commitment to doing what you say you're going to do.

6 Ho`oheno To sincerely cherish and love another. To be demonstrative in your affection.

7 Po`okela speaks to the strive for excellence. To excel, to surpass, to set your sights to the highest level of achievement.

8 Kōkua is the act of being helpful. To provide relief by assisting others. To lend support whereby one assumes the same sense of responsibility as the receiver of the assistance toward completing a task or activity.

9 Kuleana to view responsibility as a privilege and honor. To accept responsibility as a duty, not in pursuit of reward, but because it is the right thing to do.

10 Kūpono is about uncompromising honesty. To be fair and just in your relationships. To always seek the just and decent path in your dealings and decisions.

11 Lōkahi meaning unity, to be expressed with harmony.

12 Laulima is the condition of cooperation that causes everyone to work together toward a common goal. It is about many hands working together without attention to rank or position so that one person's success is everyone's success.

