

## MISSION TO MARS: How To Create Your Organization's Core Values



**SPOT**  
Managed IT Services

*The Fulcrum Group has a mixture of clients ranging from large shops with their own IT teams to small and medium businesses where we are the IT team. I am frequently asked by owners and CIOs how we keep up with it all.*

### Managing through growth

A key challenge for your IT team or service organization might be dealing with the fast-paced nature of our businesses. Being a service provider means that everyone else's emergency becomes our emergency.



To properly run your team requires the ability to spend 80% of your time on standardized processes to deliver proactive and reactive support but reserve 20% of your time towards continual improvement.

### The power of team member alignment

We can't say that we have any secrets but can say that we have benefited greatly from some of the business books on the market and their advice on driving alignment.

Jim Collins and Verne Harnish are two of my favorite authors. I was drawn to Collins belief that leaders spend way too much time drafting and working on statements and not enough time trying to get the entire organization or team on the same page.

Instead, he recommends that **leaders focus on aligning action and values**. Harnish reinforces the same idea and recommends that we have just **a handful of rules we repeat frequently and act consistently on**.



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## Core values write themselves during Mission to Mars

To develop these rules, they recommend conducting an internal exercise Jim calls the Mars group and Verne calls Mission to Mars. The basic concept of the exercise is to try and distill down what makes your service organization special and try to come up with words or phrases that typify your best people.



1. **Decide who participates** - Start the exercise by deciding who you want to participate in the meeting. A small service team with 8 to 10 people might make up your whole group. A much larger organization might choose 3-5 department heads to discuss the matters with. If I re-did the exercise, I might ask a note taker to help, or have a facilitator asked the questions so I could take my own notes.
2. **Actions not words** - Imagine you've been charged with explaining your business to a team of Martian anthropologists. But Martians don't speak English, so we have to explain our core values to them through the actions of our team members. The challenge - we can only send 4 to 7 team members to Mars and the best team members are chosen based on their daily interactions. Each team member then creates their ideal list of people from your organization to send.
3. **Identify the best of the best and what makes them best** - You as the leader, or a facilitator, should collect each team member's list and identify the employees who were mentioned most often. Next, you or the facilitator should query each list-maker with more details about their chosen team member. Find out how their chosen person goes about their efforts, ask questions about what a client or fellow coworker might say about them and ask why that person is so important to your organization.
4. **Write down word-for-word**. The book suggests writing down their answers exactly as presented. I found that the more specific I was in gathering details, the more key words and phrases jumped out in the discussion, which I liked. The high school journalist in me asked questions of one



person and also invited others who were mentioned to speak up with their thoughts, for additional concept development.

5. **From potential values come your superstars** - As you organize your list of values you might have more concepts and ideas than you know what to do with. You can think of all of these as *potential values* to sift through, to determine which are the *superstar values*. For our organization, we wanted to end up somewhere between five and seven core values as the number of ideas we wanted to nurture through time. As we talked through the ideas and concepts, I found myself getting very excited with our discussions and results. Some of our senior team members also became more vocal and contributory, reviving our whole-team “spirit” which was invigorating to us all. From team members’ lists, we heard everything from simple one word descriptions, to short statements and simple phrases.



**S** Key to building your superstar values list is acknowledging **the organization's** core values, which includes using your team's words - in some cases - over your own.

6. **Double check your list of superstar values for accuracy** - Collins suggests revisiting your list and have each team member work back through the resultant values with further questions, such as:
- *Would you want your organization to continue to stand for this core value 100 years into the future, no matter what changes occur in the outside world?*
  - *Do you believe that those who do not share this core value—those who breach it consistently—simply do not belong in your organization?*
  - *If you awoke tomorrow with more than enough money to retire comfortably for the rest of your life, would you continue to apply this core value to your productive activities?*
7. **Introduce and reinforce core values with the whole team** - From my college days in a business fraternity, I learned the power of memorization and taking opportunities to reinforce those behaviors. We found it



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effective to craft a mnemonic from the first letter of each of our organization's 6 core values, "TIPLAW." We've also chosen to reinforce and show our commitment to our team by continually revisiting our core values.

The official debut of "TIPLAW" was presented in a fun fashion at our annual Christmas party, and we reinforce our core values regularly at company meetings by spotlighting one value and calling for the best story of the past month of a team member who puts that value into practice - with a \$50 reward for the best story. Also, during our various team huddles or interaction throughout the day, when those on our team display a rich core value example, a manager acknowledges it, associating it with any applicable core values.

To further enhance our commitment to these core values, we opted to stencil our 6 core values around our main cubicle office area for an eye-catching, reinforcing visual. We also produced a laminated mini-poster of our core values, that I - as President - introduce to each new team member during employee onboarding.

Sometimes less is more.

Verne Harnish's books recommend using core values to "parent" a growing company. He parallels the notion of leading a fast-paced and young organization to some of the same needs when raising children.

Both learn quicker and are more successful when you enforce a handful of rules, repeat yourself a lot and act consistently with those rules.



## The Fulcrum Group's Core Values – "TIPLAW"

### **T - Take personal ownership of self.**

*Clients hire us because they need help, so helping them is job #1.*

*Neither technology nor people are infallible.*

*Accept responsibility for any mistakes.*

*If anything goes wrong, I may not be responsible, but am accountable.*

*Recognize that only you can make you happy, at home or at work.*

### **I - Inspire client confidence.**

*Be passionate in life-long learning to truly be an expert.*

*Document as soon as possible.*

*Know our processes and our clients' business and technology.*

*It's important to know what you know; but more important to know what you don't know.*

*Pilot new technologies before deploying, or let clients know if it is the first time.*

### **P - Plan, do, review.**

*Use or create checklists to increase consistency in all your efforts.*

*Verify information or solutions before assuming they are correct (or asking a client to test).*

*Use a structured approach to everything you do (there is usually a right way and a better way).*

*Complete projects 100% of the time, and as quickly as possible.*



### **L - Look to the future.**

*Don't just answer a question or fix a problem; think, and come up with real solutions that provide more value.*

*Watch for disruptive technologies and trends that might help us, and our clients, prosper.*

*Plan out your day and week to ensure you are prioritizing the most important things first.*

### **A - Actively listen and communicate.**

*Live in our ticketing system - make sure you update tickets in a timely and thorough fashion and verify needed parties are in the loop.*

*Frequent communication means talking to clients, team or other contacts - before, during and after meetings.*

*Listen and hear real needs and don't anticipate or overcommit solutions.*

*Use documentation to communicate client information to others.*



### **W - Work as a team.**

*Be on time to client visits and be available in the office when not onsite.*

*Carry your load and support your teammates by finding and sharing all information needed.*

*Engage and share in team meetings (avoid phone and laptop if possible).*

*Always talk to a company leader if you think some process or system could be improved.*



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