



# Cultural Manifesto

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## 1 Overview

### 1.1 Purpose

This document provides an introduction to Group W's corporate values, culture and policies. It is provided to all employees and it complements the Employee Handbook by providing a context for understanding our organization and procedures.

### 1.2 Why Do We Have This Document?

We believe that all aspects of our corporation should be extensions of our values. If we are successful living day-to-day in accordance with our values, we believe that we will be more likely to be successful in our business and personal ventures and that we will always have the moral high ground in difficult situations. It is always difficult to live up to our values and we are far from perfect, but at the very least we are well intentioned and unflinching in confronting our shortcomings.

Sadly, many corporations establish the objective of making their actions consonant with their values but few actually achieve it. The litany of ways to go astray on this path is too long to be recited here. Further, a deep examination of those failures is not all that helpful in avoiding the same fate. If the lessons were easy to learn and implement, everyone would do it. A lateral solution is required.

At Group W, we approach the objective of making our actions consonant with our values by embracing a different corporate culture than most of our competitors. Our differences are founded upon our experiences, observations and considered judgment. While based upon sound principles, some of our culture appears to be unlike business practices elsewhere and this can be disorienting at times.

This document explains our philosophy and its implementation. If you understand the philosophy, you have a lodestone for navigating our culture. If you understand the implementation of our philosophy, you can accomplish your work here effectively. If you understand both, you will help us improve and adapt our philosophy and processes as we learn new lessons and as our challenges change and grow.

## 2 Our Values

*"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."*

– United States Declaration of Independence, July 4<sup>th</sup> 1776

This portion of the Declaration of Independence encompasses everything that we believe should be true for a corporation. We should have the same expectations for our company as for our nation. To accept anything less is to lose our rights.

We devote a great deal of our lives to work and life is too short and precious to do that in a less than acceptable fashion. If you believe all people are created equal, then equity in all things is the only reasonable goal. We must judge people solely by their actions, strive to be fair and flexible, and provide value for value. It is our strong view that a corporation should derive its just powers from the consent of the governed—its employees and owners. If the consent of the governed is not granted, the corporation must be altered or abolished. Great inequities arise when these premises are rejected. Everything we do proceeds from these values.

Most corporations focus on values like quality, teamwork, professionalism, ethical behavior, etc. While these principles are important and admirable, the truth that we all know but do not say is that these should be derived values not core values. They must flow from a higher purpose or they are all too often simply empty words.

## 3 Corporate Culture

### 3.1 Our Brand: “Truth Matters”

The cornerstone of our philosophy is that truth has its own independent value to us as individuals and to our business at large. So our culture is primarily oriented to allow truth to emerge. In order to discern truth, we must reliably do two things: aggressively pursue an understanding of the truth and share information.

We face many challenges at all levels of the corporation and finding the best approach to deal with them is often extremely difficult. We seek a path that navigates our varied perceptions of the truth, our available actions, and our goals. Many of our most important issues tax the limits of our understanding and judgment. In all matters, we constantly strive to reach the best solution for the corporation and our clients in accordance with our values. That is our goal and our method, the dialectic, is well matched to this goal.

The dialectic is a method of exchanging arguments and evidence in favor of certain beliefs in an attempt to reach an agreed-upon understanding of the truth. During the dialectic, beliefs may be accepted, refuted or most productively, synthesized to result in modified beliefs. The ultimate objective is to resolve the apparent disagreements through rational discussion. Once this basis is reached or the limitations of our knowledge become apparent, appropriate actions are taken and the dialectic continues.

Success requires a passionate commitment to truth beyond our individual beliefs. It requires a respect for, and willingness to consider, the contribution of others. We must recognize that the merits of the argument are important, not the status or position of the proponent. We must be open to counter-arguments and derive satisfaction from

enriching both the group's and our own understanding. At the same time, our method requires commitment to the soundness of our ideas and the tenacity and courage to argue a position that may be generally opposed. Winning the argument is not the goal – reaching a better understanding and, ultimately, making better decisions are the goals. A shared commitment to understanding the truth advances these goals on both the individual and corporate levels simultaneously.

To proceed, we must also share information freely within the company. Information is the foundation upon which we underpin our beliefs, form our hypotheses and make our judgments. The nature of our business guarantees that most of our staff possess analytic minds that hunger for data and information. When we share information, we gift others with knowledge and understanding and enable them to provide unique contributions to finding truth.

Conversely, because our culture places such a value on information, we are diminished when it is not shared. Not only are we less resilient in the face of change, but we also have a difficult time discussing and debating the merits of a proposition because we do not share access to the same information. In other social and corporate cultures, information is often regarded as power and is not shared freely. This is a grave disservice to the larger organization. Sharing information with someone who is opposed to your ideas is essential. Behaving otherwise demonstrates a lack of confidence in your position and a lack of commitment to the value of truth.

The commitment to understanding a situation is the unifying perspective of all of our employees who strive daily to find the truth in their jobs. This commitment permeates our entire business, including the services and products we provide our customers. Indeed, we believe that one of our unique competitive advantages is that we approach our customer's problems with the same passion and commitment to establishing the truth as we do our own.

Finally, while we understand philosophically that the search for truth may have limitations; we are practical in the recognition of our requirement to live in our business reality. We must chart a course and this is our method. We will be happy to debate it, if you like. Your efforts might even generate a welcome synthesis...

### 3.2 The Hive

Sharing information is vitally important in our culture, so we relentlessly pursue it throughout Group W. We usually call this “hiving” as it is akin to bees returning to the hive to share information about sources of nectar with all of the other bees. Hiving is similar to brainstorming in that a great deal of information is shared with a wide variety of people without applying the constraint of strict relevance or obvious applicability to an immediately identified objective. Hiving recognizes that the importance of a piece of information is often only clear in retrospect. Therefore, constraining the information flow to data deemed immediately relevant is often counter productive in the long-term. Hiving also acknowledges that individuals outside of the circle concerned can often contribute

valuable, lateral perspectives or provide new information that may expand a group's thinking.

We also believe information shared verbally is an efficient, multi-channel, and wide bandwidth approach. Written memos, after-action reports and e-mail exchanges all have value in our method but, in general, the pace of our day-to-day information sharing requirements is too rapid and the scope too broad to be performed practically in this fashion.

The downside of hiving is that it sometimes can seem to be an interminable process by which a group considers seemingly pointless information and continues to expand its membership without arriving at an improved understanding. This is most often true in the case of the simplest, most direct situations and problems. People more used to hierarchical organizations with well-defined information flows that correspond to clearly demarcated roles and lines of decision-making may find this shortcoming especially inefficient. We recognize this and accept it as the cost of realizing greater value. Finding the right mix is sometimes difficult, but we would rather "over hive" than "under hive."

A beneficial side effect of hiving is the development and constant strengthening of lateral and non-linear relationships within the corporation. It produces a great deal of non-traditional interaction between elements of the corporation that would normally only exchange information along narrowly defined or impersonal lines. Traditionally organized corporations constantly struggle with the problem of "stove-pipes" or "silos" that segregate their staff. Hiving is a natural remedy to segregating tendencies as it implicitly recognizes that your purview is not yours alone. Others are permitted and encouraged to poke their nose into your area. This should not be seen as a threat but rather as an opportunity to improve our corporation's ways of doing business.

Ultimately, we believe that hiving is best suited to dynamic environments where the rules constantly change and where decisions do not need to be instantaneous. Since we believe our business environment fits this description, the costs of the hive are far outweighed by its long-term suitability to our challenge. When coupled with our commitment to finding truth, hiving enables us to adapt rapidly to our changing environment, have a hope of discovering our own limitations and improve our corporation.

### 3.3 A Smart Company for Smart People and the Pain of Openness

An extension of our philosophy is that our employees are smart so we should listen to them. Correspondingly, they routinely precipitate, participate in and are sought out during the dialectic at all levels of the corporation.

Again, many companies have the goal of listening to their employees. This is a commonly cited "open door policy." The difference with us is that we encourage and expect our employees to challenge leadership and infrastructure. While this is more often than not a positive experience it can sometimes indirectly (or directly!) indicate that we are performing poorly.

When we are confronted with a smart person presenting constructive criticism suggesting that we have been doing something wrong, it is difficult not to feel professionally threatened. This is especially true when the differences in perspectives and diplomatic skills between individuals are considered. Nevertheless it is the price of openness and we must try to remember that the free, unrestricted search for truth is a key feature of the culture we want. It is tough to do but, upon reflection, we should appreciate that if colleagues can confront us over controversial issues, then our culture is succeeding. We are in service to the truth and are therefore obligated to be open to the fact that we might actually be doing something ill considered no matter how hard we are trying. Even when the colleague is wrong, the challenge not only affords us an opportunity to establish a shared understanding, but is also a valuable learning experience in explaining and justifying our actions to someone else. We must all be prepared to handle these situations. We must always acknowledge an colleague's position or perspective.

### 3.4 Equity Is Our Measuring Stick

Despite our dialectic and hiving, there are a great many problems for which no clear or compelling solution is apparent. Sometimes matters of judgment, perception, motive and uncertainty may dominate all other factors.

For internal matters, we appeal to equity as our goal. Fairness and flexibility are goals that we can all stand behind and feel comfortable with even while accounting for differences in judgment. We must carefully weigh each situation, hive it around and reflect upon it to ensure that we are acting fairly. If we believe we have acted unfairly, we must recognize and address the issue, within the bounds of practicality.

Please remember that equity is not the same thing as equality. Many things are properly unequal (e.g., for a given set of skills, a more capable employee may be better compensated than a less capable employee) but nothing is properly inequitable (e.g., for a given set of skills and capability it is inequitable to compensate one employee differently than another based upon knowledge of their personal financial situations).

### 3.5 The Value of Infrastructure

Our infrastructure staff contributes to the excellence of our company. We recruit for the same levels of passion and skill in our infrastructure staff as in our "billable" technical staff. In many corporations, the infrastructure staff is viewed as a cost to be minimized or, in no small way, as second-class citizens to the "billable" or production employees. We strongly reject this view at Group W. Infrastructure roles are valued in terms of respect and contribution within the company. In many ways, a failure in infrastructure is a surer road to business failure than a failure in technical "billable" work.

A quality infrastructure creates a number of additional desirable consequences. Employee satisfaction in general increases when infrastructure functions are performed well. It is easy to be proud of working for a company that has its act together in terms of

the basic corporate functions employees and customers experience first hand. Conversely, it is difficult to overestimate the impact on morale of having a poor infrastructure that routinely gets basic functions wrong, is unable to solve recurring problems and has a significant turnover rate.

Similarly, customers and their own infrastructure staff enjoy working with competent corporations who “get it right.” When things do occasionally go wrong, this good will helps resolve issues and keep the business moving forward. A positive infrastructure relationship with the customer accretes to our overall success as a business by word of mouth, positive vibe and, more formally, in past performance evaluations during contract competitions.

Finally, a quality infrastructure staff helps ensure that the business is run harmoniously, efficiently and without undue risk. This equates to real financial returns for the corporation in the short- and long-terms. A solid infrastructure means that there are more resources to share with everyone, we are able to plan for the future rather than focus exclusively on the problems of the moment and it creates a strong position when times are hard.

This is perhaps the part of our culture that most resembles the claims of other companies. In our experience, very few companies actually mean it and work to achieve it. For us, it is simply a given.

### 3.6 “Facta Non Verba” (Deeds Not Words)

We believe that the important things in life are simple but not easy. It is often quite simple to understand the right thing to do but it takes a great deal of commitment, determination and discipline to actually do the right thing in any sustained fashion. The forces of life exert powerful and subtle pressures that often prevent us from accomplishing the simple things. For this reason we believe in deeds not words. Words are important as a means of communication but in the end it is only by our deeds that we may judge others and ourselves.

### 3.7 A Final Point on Our Culture

Our culture is one of the reasons we all choose to work at Group W. It enriches our work experience and our competitiveness. It is a product both of our shared values and individual experiences. It exists at every level and every location of our corporation and cuts across all of our duties. Our culture is not a static, monolithic creation but rather a living and evolving system that we alter, for good or ill, with our every action. Please improve it with your actions.