



## Collective Intelligence Solutions

*Helping People Think Together Better*

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### What Is Important?

#### *Resolving Values Conflict in Teams using Question Driven Leadership™ Skills*

*By Ham Hayes and Robert Bystrom*

Unexamined values can tear a company apart, and nobody knows what hit them. Conflicting values are the invisible hand which fragments efforts and dissipates drive. If something is eating away at the cohesion of your project team or department, you need to open up a conversation about what is important to you, to your company and to the individuals working with you. You also need to keep in mind that what is important changes as circumstances change.

What is important? To overlook that question is to invite disaster.

#### **Values can be a sometimes thing.**

Most people would say that they have values. They believe that their values guide them when they make difficult choices. However, critical situations may result in choices being made that are in conflict with a person's declared values. For example, a person might say honesty is one of his core values; but when he makes a mistake, may find himself wanting to dodge responsibility. What happens is that an undeclared, or default value is trumping or overriding a declared value. We define a default value as any value which remains unconscious or unacknowledged. We observe this overriding behavior in government, business and personal life and it leads to mistrust and other counter-productive interpersonal behaviors. The cost is that we no longer feel safe in our relationships, work environment or community.

If we are so certain about what is important to us, why do we sometimes find ourselves showing conflicting behavior? Is it possible that certain default values can overwhelm our declared values? Is there a way to understand values that will help us resolve the conflicts and manage them to the betterment of our lives? At Collective Intelligence Solutions, we believe that a better approach is available using our Question Driven Leadership™ Program.

Once a values conflict is recognized within us individually, it can be identified as a critical dynamic in interpersonal relationships, in the family, community and the workplace. Not only is the individual dealing with their own conflicting values, but with conflicts in other individual's values or the values of the group in which they belong as well. The results of these value conflicts can be far reaching and debilitating: denial, unwillingness to collaborate, sabotage and diversion of attention and resources away from important issues.

### **Maria's Story—Avoiding a Breakdown**

Maria was a rising star in her company, an exclusive high-end inn. Her development had been nurtured by the inn's owner with formal training, on-the-job coaching and a progressive increase in job duties as well as benefits. The owner considered Maria's performance excellent and Maria an exemplary model to the other employees. Recently, Maria's performance began to slip. Forgotten assignments, incomplete follow up and deteriorating relationships with other employees became more frequent occurrences, leading to the distress of the owner. She was deeply saddened by the deteriorating situation as their professional and personal relationship had deepened over the years.

The situation was headed for a destructive conclusion. Instead, the owner used a simple Question Driven Leadership™ values management technique by asking Maria, "What is important to you?" The ensuing conversation revealed a previously unrecognized value that had become increasingly important to Maria. By identifying what was important to Maria, as well as what was important to the owner and to the inn, it became apparent that Maria's personal values were no longer were in alignment with the values of the inn. Maria's changes in performance reflected this change in personal values, but the shift wasn't recognized until the impact on the inn operations became significant. The events led both Maria and the owner to new insight into the importance of having a conscious understanding of the values that were part of their world and how they can change with time. Maria recognized that her new values couldn't be satisfied by remaining at the inn and she decided her best course was to leave.

Because of her new awareness, the owner supported Maria's choice and provided positive recommendations about Maria's service. She learned the importance of discussing and assessing values within her company. In fact, one of her new strategies is to hold a values-focused discussion with new job applicants before they are employed.

### **What happens when conflicts in values are not recognized?**

If its members do not support its values, the integrity and unity of an organization is at risk. A misalignment of values will lead to a host of dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors, damaging the performance of the organization.

By not identifying the individual and organizational values and potential conflicts within and between them, everyone involved is put into a state of stress. In the presence of conflicting values, the focus of an organization shifts away from problem solving, accomplishment and fulfillment of both individual and organizational purpose. It shifts to protectionism, blame and breakdowns in communication. In these situations, less skillful managers fail to recognize the origins of the problem, and create misdirected efforts to find solutions. They rely on hope to change things before they drown.

### **Learnable Skills and Strategies for Turnaround**

A strategy for recovering from this situation is to implement Question Driven Leadership™ values management skills. These skills will allow you to identify and resolve values conflicts before they significantly impact the organization and its members. Your organization will mature as it becomes more values-based. Your customers and your community will respond positively. As in the case of Maria, these skills can quickly move individuals, teams and organizations from crisis reactions to purposeful response.

Your values are your road map, the map that you and your organization will follow. Understanding values and employing a process of alignment and resolution results in less wasted effort, less dissention, less blame and more effective collaboration. Developing a values-based organization that thinks and works coherently is the fundamental nature of what Question Driven Leadership™ delivers.

If you recognize a need for coherent values alignment in your organization and to learn more about Question Driven Leadership™ values management, please send us an email or give us a call at 360-319-1936.

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