

3 Ways To **IGNITE & ACCELERATE COMPANY CULTURE**

when
I grow
up...

A company's culture is effective only if it engages employees and enables the business to deliver on its goals. At the core is the company's behavior-based values and enduring purpose—its reason for being, stated in a way that aligns employees around the greater good they contribute to the world. Our purpose is our “why,” our values are the “how,” and together they are guiding our decisions when there are no clear answers, and they have resulted in improved scores for every culture-aligned question on this year's employee engagement survey at my company, Ingredion, a Fortune 500 provider of ingredient solutions to the global food and beverage manufacturing industry. The fact is that a strong company culture is invaluable to your business's future success.



In 2019, we introduced our purpose and contemporized values to provide firm footing for success in today's ever-changing world—and this was before COVID-19. I am so grateful that this foundation was in place throughout Ingredion from our front-line employees to our senior leaders to help us navigate the unprecedented disruption in our world. It's been evident that our shared purpose is uniting us on our journey, and our values are illuminating the path.

What did we learn through this journey? Following are three critical success factors to building and sustaining an effective culture.

Success Factor #1:

Deep Listening and Co-creation

We've instinctively known all along that creating culture is a shared experience. Simply put, it's "how we do things around here." It's what makes us distinctively "us." So, it takes ALL of us to create it, and it starts with deep listening.

At Ingredion, we started by listening to nearly 700 employee, leader and executive voices in focus groups and interviews. Listening deeply into the organization at all levels of the organization not only gave us insights to shape our future state culture, it set the stage for broad acceptance and ownership. "Co-creating" the culture ensures a certain amount of buy-in from the very start, and it is, in fact, an intervention in and of itself, as soliciting employee input signals the start of change.

An important element of co-creation is keeping people informed along the way. As themes started emerging from our listening activity, we resisted holding this information for "the big unveiling." Rather, we shared emerging themes at town halls and through other communications, bringing employees along on the journey with us. Our big launch was more about celebration and codifying the purpose and values with specific language and images.

Another part of effective listening is to never stop listening! Since the official launch, we have been soliciting employee stories about their connection to Ingredion's purpose and values and sharing them widely. I love hearing the lore-creating stories and how they are solidifying the type of culture we are creating together.

Success Factor #2:

Inspiring, Empowering and Activating Leaders

While we were gaining insights to inform the new purpose and values via the focus groups, we were simultaneously co-creating with our executive leadership team (ELT). I set out to make space for self-discovery and deep dialogue with our ELT around who we are as a company—and who we need to be going forward. To get us talking about what many would consider the "soft stuff," I convened the ELT in a mini-workshop setting. Central to our conversation was a simple yet powerful deck of 85 cards—each depicting a distinct organizational value. Each ELT member was charged with sorting their personal deck, prioritizing values they felt would drive the mindsets and behaviors needed to create the type of company we would be proud to work for, and to enable us to successfully navigate the changing and fast-paced food industry.

What we saw rising to the top were values we never would have said aloud in the past—emotion-laden words like "care," "belonging," and even "love." This opened a deeper, candid conversation that helped us align on what it would take to succeed in our company's next chapter.



This simple card exercise was liberating. It allowed us to let go of some long-held beliefs that were central to our past success but would not serve us well in the future – deep-rooted beliefs that would become roadblocks to change if not surfaced and given a path to gracefully exit. It gave us permission to think differently and the courage to lead the culture change for the entire company.

With this important ELT foundation in place, we turned our attention to all people leaders because I believe the most influential factor affecting how employees live the culture is their direct manager. How are managers' actions and decisions aligning with the desired culture? And how are they holding their teams accountable for the same?

We recently launched a manager culture accelerator program to inspire, empower and activate managers across Ingredion to lead with culture. It is creating a community of managers and leaders through deliberately sequenced touchpoints to keep them energized and empowered as change agents. Program components include leader-led learning, independent reflection exercises, peer conversations and shared accountabilities and, of course, support to help them teach their teams.

We have also introduced a similar program to target senior leaders linking their role in creating an effective culture with overall growth of the business. Leading with culture is becoming truly engrained in what it means to be a leader at Ingredion.

Success Factor #3: **Aligning People, Policy and Systems**

If culture is “how we do things around here,” we need to align our people on a common understanding of the expected behaviors.

To build a solid foundation of understanding, shortly after our launch we conducted a five-month value of the month (VOTM) campaign, targeting deep interaction with one value each month. We organized a global community of about 80 culture ambassadors who were responsible for amplifying the culture messages, and most importantly, making the messages relevant to employees in their sites. The corporate office provided VOTM kits, including “snackable” messages in multiple languages

along with images to use in local communications, training assets, manager discussion questions for team meetings, managers' checklist of behaviors to watch for and reward, “Did You Know” fact sheets providing proof points and a “top 20 idea starter” list to spark creative ways to celebrate the value locally. A thread throughout the VOTM campaign was storytelling. Today, we continue to source and share stories that help employees understand the desired behaviors and demonstrate progress that we are accelerating on our culture journey.

Once employees are aligned on the desired culture, they are going to be looking for consistencies (and inconsistencies) in their leaders' behaviors, as well as in the company's policies and systems that govern how things are done around here. Rather quickly, we modernized our family leave and work-from-anywhere policies and aligned our peer recognition programs to the desired behaviors behind our values. We are currently revamping our performance management system as well.

We are also systematically reviewing our business processes to remove barriers that employees have told us are keeping them from fully living the values. For example, how we make decisions and enable people to be agile and innovative. To address the barriers head-on, we are adopting a process that empowers those closest to the work to develop solutions in an agile fashion. We are early on our journey but making steady progress with some initial wins.

What's Next?

It's clear we will continue to navigate in uncharted waters for some time. The strong foundation created with our inspiring purpose and our illuminating values is giving me confidence that our culture will hold us up in good times and challenging times. The next chapter of our culture transformation journey is now starting, as we build on that foundation to ignite a culture of growth for our business.

— *By Elizabeth Adefioye*