

Core Values

Greetings in the spirit of Christ... our moral example and righteous judge!

My name is Tom Bandy. For over twenty years I have consulted with churches of all sizes, cultures, theologies, and traditions ... in North American and internationally. My website is www.ThrivingChurch.com.

Core values are one of two elements that combine to create a Foundation of Trust. Core Values are different from Bedrock Beliefs, and consensus about both is necessary for trust. Core values are about predictable behavior patterns; and Bedrock Beliefs are about unshakeable faith convictions.

Today I want to guide you through the process of building clarity and consensus about Core Values. A core value is not a vague ideal, wishful thinking, or ideological agenda. Here are three related definitions. You might want to pause this video to discuss each one so that you are clear about what a core value is:

- 1. A Core Value is a positive, predictable behavior pattern. It is the preference or choice congregational members can be expected to make, spontaneously or daringly, in daily living.**
- 2. A Core Value is the standard of behavior we strive earnestly to achieve, and for which we hold each other accountable. If we fail, we feel very sad, and do everything in our power to correct our error as soon as possible.**
- 3. A core value is an action with a measureable outcome. It is a verb, not a noun. Define the action with a few descriptive words that make it clear what should result.**

St. Paul first described core values as *nouns* in Galatians 5: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, generosity, faithfulness, and self-control. In the midst of controversy in the earliest churches, however, he learned that he had to describe core values as *verbs* and *adverbs*. In Romans 12 he says:

Love genuinely, rejoice in good times and bad, be patient in tribulation, go to extremes in hospitality. Rejoice in good times and bad, live in

harmony with others, and overcome evil with good. Be constant in prayer, practice humility, live peaceably with all, and be aglow with the Spirit.

As a noun, core values are principles that we can agree about, but not live up to. As a verb, core values can be used to hold leaders and members accountable in the church.

The goal of the process to clarify core values is not to create an idealistic list good behavior. It is to create a practical tool to train, evaluate, and hold leaders and members accountable to a daily standard of behavior.

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The process to build clarity and consensus about core values takes about 4-6 weeks of intentional work. You may need to set other activities aside, so that you can concentrate on this task. A team should be appointed to organize, lead, and monitor the process. There are three basic steps:

Step #1: Large Gathering and Table Groups

This may take the form of a leadership retreat for large churches; or it could be a congregational gathering for small churches.

The best place to hold the retreat or meeting is *outside the church building*, but *within the mission field*. It is helpful to gather away from the building, because the distractions of property, memories of past hurts, and obsessions with sacred cows tend to encourage factions and undermine consensus. However, it is best to stay inside the mission field, rather than go to a campground or retreat center in the woods, because the context of *real people* and *public diversity* helps sharpen our awareness of both negative and positive behavior habits.

The retreat process or meeting is to create two lists.

The first list identifies the top 10 (or 12) positive behavior patterns that our church people consistently model in their daily living ... or that they really try to model in their daily living, feel badly when they fail, and try intentionally to achieve.

For example, one church listed the following core values. Some they accomplished consistently, and some intermittently, but all were earnest and urgent, and used to evaluate staff and volunteers:

- **Warm in our welcome**
- **Loyal to our tradition**
- **Personal in our attention**
- **Positive in our thinking**
- **Cheerful in our volunteering**
- **Respectful in our care giving**
- **Forbearing in our relationships**
- **Loving others by serving strangers**
- **Making peace by forgiving hurts**
- **Quiet, constant, and confident in our joy!**

What if your church modeled these values? Imagine how united we would feel! How safe visitors would feel among us! How confident we could be in our leadership!

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The second list usually emerges from the discussion of the first. The second list identifies the key negative behavior patterns that our church people chronically demonstrate, despite themselves, in their daily living. These are often called "corporate addictions". They honestly represent the worst of our congregation, the bad reputation we have in the community, and the behavior of which we are ashamed and try to repent.

For example, the same church that listed the positive values above, also listed these negative values:

- **Cowardice in holding friends and family members accountable to a higher standard;**
- **A blind eye to instances of sexual harassment, flirtation, and disreputable humor;**
- **Denigration of other people by race and class, and churches by denomination and tradition;**
- **Over-reaction, high emotion, and cutting remarks;**
- **Turf protection and rivalry;**

- Gossip and failure to preserve confidentiality;
- Conspicuous consumption and obsession with property and prestige;

Church people were not proud of themselves in this, but they were honest enough to admit that these were not just occasional mistakes. They were bad habits that undermined trust.

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The method used to create these lists involved a fairly typical process of table group conversation; reporting and discussion; and more table group conversation. There were compromises and debates. The final results collated the best insights of the group ... but were unfinished and tentative.

Both lists are then written down and distributed to all participants ... and placed in the Sunday bulletin for the next several weeks to stimulate prayer and discussion. Members can use this as a check list ... and check off those positive and negative behavior patterns that they see or do not see on Sunday morning.

Step #2 Small Groups or Focus Groups

The results of the retreat or meeting are tentative. As a general rule, only active participants come to a retreat or large meeting. In order to build consensus, their insights must be tested and expanded through conversation with less active church members and others.

Focus groups can be held anywhere, but usually away from the church building. They may meet in private homes ... but be sure to include groups in care-giving institutions to allow less mobile members to participate. Small groups should be no more than 12 people and no fewer than 6 people. This is small enough to encourage everyone to have a voice, but large enough to ensure diversity of opinion.

The goal of each small group is to review and refine the two lists that emerged from the retreat or large meeting. Every group should have a facilitator. This person may also be a hostess, but he or she should be able to encourage conversation that includes everyone, and record the revised lists that emerge from the group. These lists are shared (without any names) with the coordinating team.

It usually takes 2-3 weeks to gather as many small groups as possible. Be sure to provide options. Some people attend a group because they know and trust the person who is facilitating it. Others attend a group because the time and place is most convenient.

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Step #3 Congregational Gathering

This second large gathering should be an invitation to everyone in the congregation (members and active adherents).

The Coordinating Team will have gathered, collated, and synthesized all the revisions for the various small groups. The new list of positive and negative values may be a bit longer. This large gathering will follow the usual table group process of discussion and reporting.

The result is a "final" list of top 10 positive behavioral expectations ... and a handful of negative habits. These are not carved in stone. Next year a church process can revise it again, if necessary. However this list can now be used in several ways:

- Place the positive core values on the website for all to see;**
- Use the core values for a membership assimilation and leadership training;**
- Place them in job descriptions and committee mandates;**
- Designate board evaluation of all ministries and ministry leaders regularly.**

I know once church that was so urgent and intentional about accountability that they painted two murals on the walls on either side of the sanctuary. On the right, there was a Tree of Life, and every green leaf and beautiful flower was labeled with a positive core value. On the left, there were vivid red flames and smoke. Every ash and spark was a negative corporate addiction. It was plain to all what they strived to become, and what they wanted to leave behind!

There are various exercises and resources on my website that you can use or customize for your own process to build clarity and consensus about core values.

Congratulation! You have completed the first element to create a Foundation of Trust!