Team values I value

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We work with a bunch of vendors as a company of 44 people. As a manager, I have 2 choices:

1. I can coach my team so they can manage vendors and get the desired output.
2. I can manage everyone myself, but at the cost of foresight.

The second choice keeps control with me and taxes foresight. The first distributes judgment. In a lean, agentic organization, that distinction matters: the manager's job is not to become the bottleneck with better dashboards. The job is to turn people into operators who can manage vendors, AI agents, and stakeholders without waiting for permission.

Management is something I've had to figure out. Books are great for anecdotes but seldom translate to the constraints of the real world. Especially your unique constraints.

The problems each team faces aren't entirely unique. They are usually variations of the same patterns. But the solution and the sequence of execution are unique in practice.

I went with option 1. I decided to give my team the playbook of how I manage, and coached them on how they can onboard, ramp, and manage vendors.

In the age of AI, I doubt there will be more than 2-3 layers to an organization. The upcoming era of grooming the next generation of leaders will be centered on managing AI agents, vendors, and stakeholders, not direct reports.

So here is everything I value as a manager, from a cultural perspective. This is not a motivational values doc. It is an operating standard for how I expect people to behave when the map is blank.

Why is the map blank?

I ran a podcast in 2020-21 during the COVID years and first-hand witnessed how HR leaders navigated a world without a playbook. Transitioning an entire organization to remote work overnight is no easy feat.

Running a remote team is extremely high-trust. I was pretty amazed at how the HR function was able to bring about this transformation with minimal business disruption.

That's when I realized that it's not just the rules, but the battlefield itself that changes. Constantly.

Up until 2025, the problem management faced was having a spectrum of workers on the "shop floor": Gen X, millennials, and Gen Z.

As agents have become the norm in 2026, you have agents and AI tools in the mix too.

So, how do you define team culture and strategy in the agentic era?

That's why I feel that the map is perennially blank. The goalposts change, the metrics change, the work changes, and the composition of the team changes. Earlier, I used to measure individual performance by productivity metrics. As a manager now, I'm looking at average revenue per employee.

Everyone's OKR is revenue-focused. Causally. Not through loose correlation. If you cannot draw a line from your work to revenue, the work is probably theater.

What culture really means to me

Culture is the DNA of how you operate as a team and as a company. It's the playbook, the modus operandi. Benefits and perks aren't culture to me. It's how the team consciously chooses to operate without supervision, and how information flows both within the team and outside of it.

It's a code of conduct, but in the context of what the individual and the team collectively stand for.

My non-negotiable values

Ownership

To me, this simply means 2 things: following up and following through. The way I differentiate between the 2 is:

1. Following up = how proactively one is sharing updates, surfacing blockers, and thinking from a systems and first-principles perspective for every task. I do not like order-takers. Did you close the loop without being chased?
2. Following through = can you see a task through end-to-end and holistically? The thing with ICs is that sometimes one can be too focused on their swimlane and forget to zoom out and see how it works in conjunction with the larger goal and the rest of the business.

Accountability

Accountability is not a task list and blind update-sharing. Success is a collective responsibility. Here's what it means in my books:

1. What is your say/do ratio? I wrote about why consistency compounds as well. This is disproportionately important in my team.
2. How proactively can you manage stakeholders? In my opinion, managing stakeholders is not rocket science. It's a simple recipe of an email trail, removing blockers, tactfully enabling people, and knowing when and what to escalate. I always encourage my team to work with a mindset of making your stakeholder's job easier from day zero, without expectations. Send them templates, content, and anything else that's needed without even asking. Proactively and periodically ask them for blockers. No one ever opens up about it without a nudge.

3. How do you balance short-term vs. long-term fixes? Projects are inherently grey areas. In the interest of shipping things, short-term fixes are great. But can you figure out a way to implement a long-term fix by yourself, so you don't encounter the same problem twice?

4. Do you know how to say no, both upward and to your stakeholders, without a personal agenda?

Agency and Urgency

I would've called this "work ethic" in 2025, but in the agentic era, it's a rebrand.

1. Why not today? Decisions are either one-way doors or two-way doors. One-way door decisions need to be made carefully, deliberately, and in compliance. Two-way door decisions need bias towards action. ICs that own both the outcome and the decision become true thought partners. The best feedback loops in the world are action-driven, not document- and approval-driven. Validate and invalidate hypotheses, and let data and market sentiment guide you. Not a BS approval matrix.

2. How ambitious are you? It's one thing to scrape a prospect list, another to tier and score it, identify buying committees, categorize them into what funnel they need to go into, and then build a personalized, automated engine that runs on its own. The human-in-the-loop aspect needs to be minimal, and on a cadence.

3. Do you know your customers' pains and problems? I wrote about the difference between them and it's mission-critical for success. It gets you respect super quick across functions too. Knowing your customer well, and how their needs are evolving, is foundational to understanding why you choose to optimize for a certain north star metric. If prospects and customers are finding it hard to buy from you easily, there's no point in losing sleep over site impressions.

4. Are you tied at the hip? 11/10 teams work in silos. Even in the same team, one does not know what the other is up to. Over my career, I've seen this quickly evaporate all remaining empathy. Secondly, I'm a huge fan of theory of constraints, and it is the single mental model I use to solve any personal or business problem. As a manager, I intentionally ensure cross-pollination by getting individuals with complementary skill sets to team up and own an outcome. It's always a driver-copilot model in every team, but no more than 2-3 folks per project. Beyond that, mimetic thinking and herd mentality set in.

Craftsmanship

Be enviably good at your job. It's a professional obligation to stay at the frontier of what's happening in your field. In everything you do, the operating mindset needs to be:

Customer > Company > Team > Self

Document, and document everything

Context is everything. Documentation should be a default mindset. How well you write, format, and organize your documents will tell me more about how far you'll go in life than the skills you're

probably arrogant about.

Earn your seat, every day

I hire slow, but fire fast. No passengers. A team is like a high-performing sports team. If you want to get drafted for the next season or want to retain your position, then you have to earn your seat every single day.

Kindness is default. Diplomacy is defensive.

One thing I've always told my team is that you have to operate with a blind faith that your manager and leaders have the best intentions for you at heart. Even when they're giving feedback that is hard to swallow.

You're not competing with your peer. In the battlefield, you're responsible for each other's success.

Nothing erases your entire credibility faster than being defensive.

And more importantly, have a sense of humor. I love taking jokes on myself, and it's a non-negotiable to have fun along the way. Nothing is worth it otherwise.

Say it, or forever keep your silence

Say it in the room where it matters or in Slack channels. But sharing your real opinion after the fact really doesn't help anyone.