

Campaign Response on 4/14/09 to:

[Clare Matton MCIPD](#), Organisational Development Manager at Guildford Borough Council: *“Has anyone got any interesting techniques they have used when developing/re-visiting organisational values?”*

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**Here’s a fresh idea.** Begin with an image of ... Jeffrey Dahmer. Got your attention? If you need a gruesome reminder about Jeffrey and his dining habits, go to Wikipedia, but not during lunch, please.

Years ago Jeffrey was abruptly injected into this world in the same manner we all were. Like us, he arrived “out of the box,” as it were, unsynchronized and failing wildly about. Then something astonishing happened. Like every human being, his infant brain automatically and unconsciously launched a program of self-construction. (Who said kids don’t come with directions?).

The tiny brain fanatically obeys one overriding command: “Hard-wire thineself in such a way as to maximize survival potential within thine immediate environment.” Every living organism, humans notwithstanding, marches through life in response to that mother-of-all-instincts: Survival.

Scientists generally agree that that the brain’s hard-wiring process continues through the late teens, give or take a few crises. Data received by the brain from its bevy of external sensors, is transposed, arranged and “embossed,” as it were, to form a hard-wired menu of what it takes “make it” in life. While Jeffrey’s – eh – ‘menu’ deviated from the norm, it was nevertheless constructed in the same way, according to the same instructions, as ours.

**POINT:** If you want to understand the source of an organization’s culture and values, consider what it takes for one to survive in that environment.

Remember the Hatfield-McCoy feud of late 19th century America? If you were born a Hatfield you were pre-habilitated to hate, distrust, and even kill McCoys. Questioning this “wisdom” might lead to your final swallow of white-lightening. Today, there are some Armenians and Turks that hate each other for the same reason. They don’t know exactly why: they just do. It’s the way they were hard-wired.

This is our reality. It is a universal law throughout humankind. So, before you drop another nickel on yet another useless staff retreat, remember: Living organisms are

driven instinctively to do whatever ‘they perceive’ is necessary, for better or worse, to insure their survival. It’s the law, and a valuable one. In fact, it is the very reason you are reading this article now.

Don’t waste your time trying to altar [sic] the values of those at the end of their careers. Were they not already survivors, despite an oftentimes massive bleeding of integrity, they would no longer be drinking at the company urn.

Rather, launch a fresh program designed to pre-habilitate your newest employees, your newborns, with the values of respect, tolerance, generosity, teamwork, and consideration. Make it clear that this is what it takes to survive at this company. Not only will you see an increase in productivity and less time spend on hiding errors, you will also see the organization’s menu change: there will simply no longer be an appetite for head-under-glass or slander du jour.

Jon Michael Sherry

Camp\*aign for American Kids

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