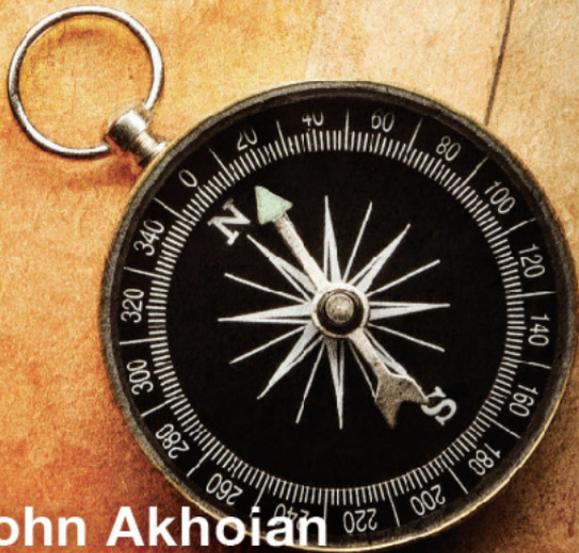


VALUES FIRST

Principle Driven
Leadership



John Akhoian

Values First

Principle-Driven Leadership

John Akhoian

Values First

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Acknowledgment

I want to acknowledge a good friend, Mike West, for having a huge impact on me as well as the values we created for this company. I want to recognize all the leaders as well as Ron Garcia and Cory Harding who helped in the construct of these values. I also want to acknowledge our company clients, who hold us accountable to our values through the service experience we give them, and our team that believes in our values and uses them daily in their lives at home and at work.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my two boys, Andrew and Christian, for being observers and making me realize my actions are so loud they can barely hear me talking. And to round out the people that have had a positive impact on me, I'd like to acknowledge my wife for always being a law-abiding citizen and making sure she holds our family to the highest standard.

Introduction

When I first came up with the idea to write this book, I had an associate ask me why I wanted to write it. I thought long and hard, and then it hit me. I wanted to write this book because I don't do a good enough job of living our company's values. Writing this book has helped me focus on those values and will give me a better understanding of what they stand for.

My associate also warned me that, by professing these values, I would be held to a higher standard. I would be expected to live them 24/7. He told me my management team would also be held to a higher standard, and if one of our managers did something contrary to the principles, his actions would reflect poorly on me.

Despite this warning, I still felt the need to write this book. I am by no means perfect, and that means I don't always live these values, but my inherent flaws won't stop me from trying to live a values first lifestyle. I don't expect our managers or associates to follow them to the letter. I believe only Jesus can do that, but it is my hope our managers and co-workers will strive to live by them in their daily lives.

We read these values before every meeting, which is good practice, but it isn't enough. I don't do a good enough job of examining and discussing these values with my team. It is my hope this book will remedy some of that. When we live these principles, everyone associated with our company wins. Our customers receive the benefits of long-term solutions. Our associates work with people who want to do the right thing. I win because principles endure, and that means our company will endure.

If, at any point in this book, it sounds like I'm preaching, know that I'm not. I am merely sharing the values that have sculpted and changed my life for the better. Our company is faith-based, and I don't apologize for my beliefs. Applicants don't have to be religious or spiritual to work for me, but they do have to be decent people willing to do the right thing every time.

It is my wish this book will enlighten all who read it, and that everyone in our company, myself included, will become a better person and live a happier life, and whoever reads this book will find value and joy in it. Today, we start a new journey together; I look forward to all the blessings that await us along the way.

John Akhoian
Owner of Rooter Hero Plumbing

Chapter One

Magic Moments

Lee and The Doctor

I want to open this book with a story that still gives me chills to this day. I believe this story illustrates our value system at work. It began a few years ago when my managers and I were attending a training course. One of the things we learned, in our training, was to present our customers with multiple options that would solve their problem. Our goal was never to present one solution and convince the customer to buy something she didn't need.

I was carpooling with, Ken, one of our managers, when we received a call from a potential customer. He asked if we could drop off an estimate tomorrow morning. Ken and I decided to put our training to work and instead of giving, Lee, our potential customer, an estimate we

would give him options, and leave it up to him to make a choice.

We stopped early the next morning and picked up some coffee and danish. When we knocked on Lee's door, he asked if we could drop the estimate in the mailbox. "I can do that," I said, "but the coffee and danish won't fit." Lee opened the door and invited us in. We explained that we didn't bring him an estimate, but a list of six options we wanted him to review. We explained we didn't want to "sell" him something he didn't want. Instead, we wanted him to have options that would address his immediate problem and options that would address other issues we saw around the house.

Lee explained he wasn't the owner of the house, and that his life partner, whom we'll call The Doctor, actually owned the house. Lee told us, The Doctor was very ill and had recently undergone Chemotherapy.

We could see the sadness in Lee's eyes, and we could also see the stress he was under. Lee was The Doctor's partner, caregiver, driver, confessor and account manager. The obligation was overwhelming. Lee excused himself, helped The Doctor get dressed and brought him out for us to meet.

We could see the devastating effects of the Chemotherapy, and we could also see how grateful The Doctor was to have Lee as his partner.

Ken and I were moved by this loving relationship. I looked at Lee and said, "I am so inspired by how you take care of The Doctor it gives me chills. If I am ever in a position where I need care like this, I hope my wife treats me exactly the way you treat The Doctor."

Lee teared up and said, "No one has ever recognized what I go through." He looked at The Doctor and smiled. "What I do, I don't do out of obligation, but out of love, but the stress can be crippling. Thank you so much for recognizing what we are both going through." He excused himself and walked The Doctor back to his room. After a few minutes, Lee came back out alone. We could see that a lot of the stress had left his face.

"The Doctor and I talked it over, and we want you to fix our plumbing problems. You are good people, and we wouldn't trust this work to any other company," he said.

Ken and I learned a couple of things that morning. The first is that customers don't want to be sold anything; they want to have choices. The second is that when you truly appreciate what your customers are going through, you create a bond. But that appreciation has to come from the heart, it has to come from a value system, and it can't be forced. If what a customer is going through truly moves us, we have learned to share that with them.

We also learned a third thing that has since shaped our marketing campaign. Our company name is Rooter Hero, and we want to be a hero for our customers, but on that Friday morning, Ken and I realized that Lee was the real hero. What he did for his partner was much more heroic than anything we could ever do. In fact, we learned that most of our customers are the real heroes. The people who call us when they have a problem and whom we are privileged to serve are the real heroes. They are heroes to their families, friends, and communities.

We are humbled and honored to help our customers, and we will continue to espouse our values so that everyone at Rooter Hero will feel what Ken and I felt on that day. I believe our value system is what sets us apart from every other company. Our values aren't just a list we print on a poster board and plaster on a wall. Our values are recited every day, discussed regularly, and hopefully lived by our associates at home and at work.

Adam's Story

Adam is one of our sewer specialists. His job is to help our technicians when they run into problems they can't handle. It is also Adam's job to offer our customers long-term solutions to their problems.

It was a Thursday afternoon when Adam got a call from one of our technicians who was having trouble clearing a bathtub drain. The cable was stuck in the line, and the technician couldn't retrieve it. Adam arrived at the job site, helped the technician with the cable, and discovered that the home's drainage system needed replacement. Adam offered the mother and son several options what would solve their immediate problem and fit their pocketbook.

During the call, Adam mentioned to the mother, Darlene, that we are a faith-based company and that he believed he was put on this earth to help others. It turned out that Darlene was a born-again Christian and she appreciated Adam's mission. Adam and Darlene had an immediate connection. They talked about their faith for an hour and a half. Adam told Darlene he believed God was watching over her and her son

We began work on a complete home repipe when, Brian, Darlene's son, told Adam about the problem he and his mother were having getting in and out of the tub. Brian asked if we needed to replace the tub during the repipe. Adam explained he could connect without having to remove it. Brian was grateful for Adam's honesty and began to walk away.

Adam could see the disappointment on Brian's face and explained he would be happy to install a walk-in tub for them. He showed Brian a website that would save them money. He told Brian to order the bathtub, and that he would be happy to pick it up at no additional charge.

Brian discussed this with his mother, who wholeheartedly agreed with the purchase. Darlene was eighty-five years old and had difficulty taking a shower. Brian had bad knees and had similar problems getting in and out of the tub. Safety was a priority for them, and they realized installing the tub during the repipe would save them money.

Brian ordered the tub; Adam picked it up and installed it for them. When the job was completed, Adam walked over to shake Darlene's hand and thank her for trusting him with the job. Instead of shaking his hand, Darlene hugged Adam and told him that she believed God had sent him to her house.

Adam called to tell me about the experience and how grateful he was that Rooter Hero believed in a set of values that had improved and enriched his life.

Chapter Two

Our First Value - Faith

Our creator put us on Earth to succeed, so every day, we strive to learn as we stretch ourselves to reach our full potential. We believe God put us on this Earth not to fail but to succeed, so we work with our associates to make sure they are stretching themselves and that they always stay in learning mode.

Every week, we have a book club where we pick up one of the current self-help books on the market. We'll read a chapter, and then, in a conference call, everyone sits down and discusses the chapter. That helps us grow. We also send out daily motivational quotes to inspire people to strive to do something new every day.

Our Commitment to our Customers and Each Other

We also have recently signed up all our managers for a two-year emerging leader program, this is just one of the training programs we have them go through that better their lives. The emerging leader program is a two-year commitment we made for all our managers, but they also go to a one-day training every month. These programs are part of our commitment to our team and our customers to always focus on self-development and growth. So we may better serve our customers and each other.

Another successful program we offer our employees is called PEP. That stands for Partner Enhancement Program. We talk about self-responsibility. We talk about the importance of understanding other people's needs before we expect them to understand us. It is based, lightly, on the *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. We offer this program to help our people become better. The better people they become, the better they will serve our customers.

When we're interviewing people to come into our company, we don't ask them what their religion is or if they believe in God, we don't use that as the criteria for hiring people. We don't believe in judging anybody for what they believe in or what their faith is.

Faith is a principle that, as it says in the first sentence in this chapter, is about our Creator, and that could be anybody. It could be our parents. It could be God. It could be whatever we believe our creator is, and that we have been put here, regardless of our circumstances to be happy and to succeed. That's the reason we believe having faith is essential in business as well as in our personal life. Faith is a guiding principle in our company.

The Turning Point in my Life

I want to share a personal story with you. When my dad died, it was a traumatic situation. I was only 17 years old when he had a heart attack and died. I still remember it like it was yesterday. It was a beautiful Saturday morning in early spring; my dad collapsed and died, right in front of me. That was 28 years ago.

When he died, I felt like my whole life was turned upside down. It was one of the most challenging parts of my entire life as a teenage boy. My father was the guardian of my soul. He was the guy we feared. He was the guy who gave us responsibilities and taught us life lessons. He was our hero.

I lost my hero at the age of 17, at the time, it seemed like it was the most devastating thing that could ever happen to me. I became very angry. I fell off the deep end and became rebellious. I went through a challenging teenage experience after that. Over time I saw how it affected me. It turned me into a very unpleasant person.

I'll never forget my father. I'll always have great memories of him. I've now grown used to him not being around, but those early years were hard. I can look back now and see what I've learned from his passing. I now see it was something that made me more responsible. Now I see my dad's death as something that has shaped me into a better person. I exercise more. I eat properly. I'm checking my heart every year, knowing that heart disease is in our genes, I want to be here for my kids for many years to come.

The Loss of my Father at Such an Early Age Created my Why, my Purpose in Life.

I truly believe my father's death was one of those life-changing experiences that made me a better person. That idea goes back to the value: everything that happens to us happens for a reason Greater than us. We use a capital G in Greater because we believe that God creates our destiny.

Therefore, we welcome all experiences, good or bad, knowing that greater success lies within them.

Nothing always goes perfectly in an organization or a company. There will always be some obstacles thrown in our way. Sometimes we try something, and it doesn't turn out the way we wanted it to turn out.

Instead of letting that get us down or stop us, I've met with other coworkers, and we sit there, and we'll laugh and say, "We welcome all experiences," because we know this is a learning experience. Learning to get around any obstacle is a learning experience, and it's going to make us better and stronger in the long run. We understand there's no such thing as perfection, but we're always striving for progress.

Chapter Three

Our Second Value - Integrity

We do the right thing each and every time. This is a value that is important to the company, but it's also one of those things we struggle with the most. As it is in real life, no one can do the right thing every time, but it's a guidepost for us. It is something that, when a situation comes up, and we're not sure what to do, we can refer to this value and ask ourselves, "What is the right thing to do?" Often, the right thing is based on our personal values and our mission statements, so more often than not; we end up doing the right thing.

On those rare occasions where that doesn't happen, I make sure the customers are taken care of or that employees are taken care of, and we end up correcting things so that we do the right thing every time.

What is the Right Thing?

Doing the right thing every time sounds good, but what is the right thing? We all know what the right thing is; however, some people take shortcuts. Sometimes those shortcuts bypass the right thing, but the values are here to remind us that, when we do make a mistake, there is a right road to take. We need to get back on that road as quickly as possible. As a company, when you have more than 200 employees, someone is bound to get off that road. By reading these values daily and by talking about them, we're encouraging everyone to get back on the right track and do the right thing.

Our second value includes treating each other fairly, respectfully, and honestly. That is something we've strived to uphold in all the manager meetings. We treat people with respect, and that means listening to other opinions, whether they agree with mine or not. What is fair, and what is not fair? Fair, in my opinion, is when both parties feel they've won, that the right thing was done, and both are satisfied with the result. We want honest people; we don't want to be breaking laws or doing anything dishonest in any way.

Making Amends

I want to share a personal story about integrity. One of our associates needed to see me and came into my office. I was busy and had quite a bit of work piled up on my desk. The associate walked into my office while I was on the computer working on something important and said hello. I said hello as well, but I continued to do the work without turning around and acknowledging him. After about five minutes when I finished and turned around, the associate wasn't there anymore. I walked around the office, looking everywhere, and I couldn't find him.

Later that evening, I remembered what had happened, and I said, "Gosh, he walked in and said hello. I knew he was going to come in, and then he was gone." It was seven o'clock at night, and I called him, and I said, "You came in, and I'm sorry. I was in the middle of something when you came in, and I didn't stop to acknowledge you." He said it had bothered him throughout the entire day and that he had wondered if he was essential to the organization or me. I felt horrible because I felt like I disrespected him; I should have turned around and given him my 100% attention. If you are in the middle of something and need to complete it, you should at least excuse yourself, but I didn't do that. The lasting effect of my behavior was that it led him to feel disrespected, even to the point he felt like he wasn't important to me.

This incident made me realize the true purpose of our values and how important it is to remember to follow these values as much as we can. Even though they're posted everywhere around the office, sometimes it ends up becoming like wallpaper. Even though it's there, you forget it. In this case, I hurt somebody important to me, and today, I must make it right.

I have one more point I'd like address, on integrity. Integrity is what you do when there is no one around. In two of our training classes, we talk about how damaging gossip is and how destructive it can be to say negative things about people. What we don't realize is that when we gossip, we create that negative image in other people's minds. It's important to us not to talk behind somebody's back, not to spread gossip. Are we perfect at that? Of course not. Nobody is, but these values are reminders that when we stray, we need to get back on track.

Chapter Four

Our Third Value - Respect

As professionals, we always pay attention to our image. We look, act, and speak professionally. We run a plumbing company and a lot of unfiltered language happens. I remember one time when I was in one of our offices in Arizona. I went to do a site visit and spent two days on location. My associates used a lot of profanity in some of their conversations to make it more dramatic and to make it more entertaining. I remember after spending two days over there, the manager of that location was driving me back to the airport and I remembered this value, so I brought it up.

Watch Your Mouth

When I came back, I noticed this language was still occurring. Whenever something would happen, I would talk to myself using profanity because I was around it so much. We must

remember that not everybody enjoys hearing profanity. When I talk to my kids about it, I tell them, "Look, we can't unhear profanity." If you don't use it, but somebody else uses it, that's okay. You don't call them on it or mention anything because we don't judge people, but you will be judged if you use it. We'd rather be neutral about it than be on one side or the other.

Not using profanity is something I always remind myself and some of our people here, as well. One of our managers, who was sharing a situation in a book club, used an improper statement. A few minutes later we used a different word that described it as dramatically as the word that he had used, he said, "that's probably a better word to use to be more neutral. I must remember that. I keep telling my kids not to use profanity, so I better not use it myself."

I said, "That's the same challenge I go through as a father. I'm not perfect myself, but we all have to remember that it's much safer to be more professional and not use any profanity."

We don't tell people how to live, but we discourage profanity entirely at the shops when anyone is at work. A lot of people will say, "I've never used that word in front of a customer." If you use profanity at the shop, it's liable to slip out in front of a customer, and that would be disastrous. That would not be treating the customer with respect.

“The absence of profanity offends no one.”

—*Carl Linebaugh*

We always want to treat people like we would like them to treat us. That's the golden rule, so we are very aware of how we are treating other people. We don't want to be taken advantage of; therefore, we don't take advantage of others. We don't want to be disrespected; consequently, we don't disrespect others.

We read the Dale Carnegie book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, at least once a year as a group because there are so many examples in there of how to treat people. That value is very, very important to us.

From time to time, we make mistakes. I had to stop writing this book for a moment so I could go out and apologize to Gary for ignoring him the previous day. It's important we treat everyone the way we would like to be treated.

Chapter Five

Our Fourth Value - Service

We strive to exceed our clients' expectations on every service call and at every interaction. One of our technicians, we'll call him George, was working on a sewer line repair. George was taught in our training classes to keep the client involved in everything he did. George took the training to heart and was continually knocking on the client's door to show her everything he was doing.

It got to the point where the client said, "George, you don't have to show me every little thing. I completely trust you. George said those were the sweetest words he had ever heard. *I completely trust you.* He learned that day that trust comes from keeping the client involved and letting her know that everything we do is designed to respect and repair her home.

George received a glowing review, and the client went as far as to send a tower of candies to the shop. George continues to be one of our top techs.

In one of our training sessions, we have five keys we talk about: The first key is to ask questions so that we can understand our customer's problems; the second key is to listen to them, so we can come up with a better solution for them; the third key is to diagnose the situation and get them involved; and then the fourth key is to educate them in a language they can understand. We never try to use jargon or professional speak. We make sure our customers completely understand what we're talking about.

The final key we call WOW. That stands for Way Over Wonderful. That ties into this value. When we are done with a job, we go over it with a customer. "Have I done everything I said I was going to do? Have I kept my promise to you? Is there anything I missed? Is there anything we need to do to make you happy?"

Once we start the work, we keep our clients involved by keeping them informed. "We're going to be digging here. Is this going to be in your way? Will you be able to park your car if we do this?" We're always trying to exceed their expectations so, when we are done, that customer feels that Way Over Wonderful feeling, and that helps our company. Bottom line, it helps us grow.

Our people feel better, our clients feel better, and we will get good reviews and great referrals out of it. It's smart business, but aside from that, when we leave the job, we know that customer is completely satisfied.

To Better Serve the Client Is Our Number One Priority

We serve our clients and educate them with options first, and then profits will follow. We have a process we use with our clients; we leave them with six options. Primarily, we want customers to choose what they can afford to pay at the time to fix their plumbing needs or their service needs. That's important to us. We always put the customer first by offering different options. When we take the time to figure out and put forth a lot of different choices, they feel empowered to make a decision they are comfortable with based on their financial abilities.

We focus on educating with options first. Educating is a big key we talk more about in our *Five Keys* book; the focus is on how we educate customers. When a customer is having a plumbing problem, we let them know our goal is to teach them, usually on more than they would like to learn about their plumbing system!

We do this because, for us, the most important thing is for them to make the right choices on doing the repairs or fixes. Most people don't expect they're going to learn so much about plumbing, but we look at ourselves as teachers. If we can educate customers, then we can empower them because now they can make educated decisions. We don't focus on profits. Profits are a byproduct of how well we educate customers and how well we put money-saving options in front of them so they can be empowered to make the right decision.

Chapter Six

Our Fifth Value - Teamwork

There is power in teamwork, we always work together to help each other carry out our goals.

Mike was on a water heater call when he twisted his ankle while removing the unit from the back of the van. Mike couldn't ask the client for help because that would not have been acceptable. In fact, Mike never told his client about the injury.

Not sure how to handle the situation, Mike jumped, on the phone, and called his manager. Mike's manager sent a new technician, who had never installed a water heater to the scene. Alex, the new tech, was a strong, young man who was able to carry the water heater to the garage.

Mike, grateful for the help, took the opportunity to train Alex. When all was said and done, Mike satisfied his client, Alex learned the proper way to install a water heater, and they both learned the power of teamwork. We have no Lone Rangers in this company. We win together, we lose together, and we grow together. In many of our trainings, we talk about being interdependent. If we have someone in the company who is not as experienced as someone else and they're struggling, we encourage everyone in the company to help that person. If you know something he doesn't know, share the information. The more you give, the more you will receive in the end. We are huge believers in what goes around comes around.

How Our Teams Work

Our company is made up of small teams. These teams are called channels and are led by a channel leader. The channel leader has anywhere from four to six people he works with. The channels are small, unique, and work well together. Whenever we do training, we usually like to bring the entire team in for the training so we can talk about leadership, teamwork, and our values.

Our organization is comprised of dozens and dozens of teams: our teams in the call center, our accounting team, our human resources team, our management team, and our field operations team.

We believe in teamwork and train our channel leaders to look and take care of their team members before they take care of themselves. We tell them, “If you help your team members give options and do the steps and follow the process we teach without worrying about yourself, you will eventually make more money by putting the customer first and by putting your team member first.

No One Succeeds Alone

Each of us is unique in different ways; we all need each other to succeed. One of the things we teach in our training is to listen to other people’s points of view. Quite often, when someone has an opinion contrary to what the rest of the team is thinking, the normal attitude is to ostracize that person to get him out of the way. He never seems to agree with the rest of us, but we teach that person’s viewpoint is of extreme value to us because it is showing us something that we don’t see as a group.

We encourage people to express their views. It is our differences we need to look at because it is that uniqueness, they have which can help us succeed.

Each of us is unique, that applies to every single individual. None of us are the same, and we talk about using those unique talents and abilities in the marketplace to multiply their value and to help the customers with long-term solutions. Everyone brings something to the table. We recognize those differences, and we realize we need those differences to help us succeed as a company and as a team.

Chapter Seven

Follow Your Moral Compass

In our company, we talk about developing a mission statement. That mission statement is basically, “What kind of person do you want to be?” One of the exercises we do is to look forward to our own funeral. People are coming up to talk about us. It could be our parents, our siblings, our friends, or even our enemies. What are they going to say about us at the end of our life? If what they’re going to say is not in line with who we want to be, then today is the day to start changing.

These values tie into all the teaching we do. It is a compass that lets us know we’ve strayed a little bit and we need to get back on track because we’re not heading for true north. I heard a story once about airplanes. They’re always off course.

They never go directly from one point to another. They are continually correcting their flight path to reach their destination, and that's what these values do for us. We realize that we're going to stray a little bit, but they get us back on course.

Perfection isn't Real

I believe, if you're looking for perfection, it will make you stop doing the things you need to be doing. Perfection creates procrastination because you're always looking for the perfect moment, for the perfect person, for the perfect time, for the perfect weather. We talk about creating progress. When it comes to these values, we don't look at being perfect human beings because we know we are all flawed in some way or another, but we all can look at ourselves and see what progress we can make today. It's such a great feeling when we can look measure back to who we were and see who we're becoming.

That's the Important Thing: Who are we Becoming?

I believe that creating values and living off certain principles and rules will create progress in somebody's life because now you have a measuring stick. You have something you can use to always compare yourself with who you were before. I've done that for many, many years

in my life, and until today, I still make bad decisions. I know that I'm not perfect, but because of these values, I have a much happier and better life. I can always see exactly where I am along my path and journey.

I have a story to share with you about one of our current managers. In our trainings, we asked the question, "Why do you work for Rooter Hero?" There are tens of thousands of home service companies' people can work for, so we want to know why people are with us. Why did they choose us?

One of our current managers told us he had an opportunity to go work for another company they had even offered him a higher salary, but he chose us because of the values we talk about. He heard us talk about the values in one of our meetings. He saw we have the values posted all over the walls in every office, and he said, "I want to work for you because you espouse many of the beliefs that I have, and I want to work for a company that is in line with what I want to accomplish." The values are important to us because they attract the people who are going to take care of our customers and treat our coworkers with respect and honesty.

I have another story about a young man who was new to our company, and he was in one of our PEP trainings. During this training, when we were on one of the breaks, he was on his cellphone, and he was erasing contacts. We

asked him, “What are you doing?” He said, “I just realized one of the things holding me back is I’ve been associating with the wrong people.” He said, “Now I have found a company with people who can help me accomplish the things I want to accomplish, so I’m going to eliminate those other people from my life because they are a bad influence.” That individual ended up getting married shortly after that, recently adopted a young son, and is currently writing his own self-help book. He also does motivational speaking, and he credits our company, our values in our trainings as being one of the forces that helped turn his life around. I’ll tell you there is no better feeling than that.

From time to time, plumbing jobs do go wrong. We’re only human, and we make mistakes, but when something does go wrong, we will spend our own money, the company’s money, to make sure we make it right. Sometimes, there is no profit when we do that. Sometimes we take a loss, but if it’s the right thing to do, we believe it will lead to profits for the company in the long term. We’ll be around for a long time. We will pick up more customers from that. Customers will tell others how we made a situation right for them, and that will lead to long-term success for us as a company.

Chapter Eight

Our Values Process

How did we come up with these values? We sat down with a management team, and we asked them, “What company do you want to work for?” We asked them, “What is it that prevents your customers from giving you rave reviews and referring you to other people?” When we heard the negatives, we took the opposite of that, and that’s how we came up with the values that we’ve talked about in this book. Everything we talk about is not something I put together, but they’re values that we put together as a team. We talked about them, and the purpose of this book right now is to remind every one of us that, from time to time, we will stray, but they are here to help us get back on track and remind us of who we are.

"Why do you work for this company?" Generally, the first answer we get is, "I need to make money." Then, we will say, "Well, you can make money anywhere. You can go to a fast food restaurant and make money. Why are you working here?" It's very thought-provoking because what we do is a process that Toyota uses called "The Five Whys." We will dig deep, whatever answer they give us, we will ask why again, up to five times.

We go deep. Sometimes we get a little off track, but ultimately, if we stay with it long enough, we get down to the root reason they came to work for us. Some of the stories that come out are so emotional and heartbreaking that it's hard to talk about. People will share things with us that you never thought they would share, but it's liberating for them. They will say things like, "I'm going to prove to my father that I am not a failure. I promised my mother I would take care of her for the rest of her life, and this company is going to help me do that. I need to set an example for my children of what hard work looks like." Some of these stories that come out make us tear up as we're listening to them, but hearing those stories helps others in the room.

When one of our techs get a call at midnight that one of our customers has a leaky faucet, they may think to themselves, "Well, a leaky faucet isn't urgent." It is urgent for our customer, or they wouldn't have called us at midnight.

They think back to their “why” they get their uniform on, and they get in their van and head out at midnight to take care of a leaky faucet if that's what they must do because that's why they work for our company. It is powerful and emotional to listen to some of the stories that come out, it makes a big difference. You must have a lot of faith in the people you work with to allow yourself to be vulnerable with them and know they respect you for it.

Final Thoughts

It is in our nature to judge people, not only by what they say but by what they do. I know that, in my position as the owner of Rooter Hero Plumbing, I am judged more often than most, and in some cases, more harshly than most. That's okay. I understand that, by espousing these values, I will be held to an even higher standard, but if, by writing this book, I can help one person be a hero to his family or help one family find happiness, then it is worth it.

The subtitle of this book is "Principle-Driven Leadership." It is my sincere goal to lead Rooter Hero by the principles and values I profess in this book. I also hope that the leadership of Rooter Hero will take these values to heart and lead, not by words but by actions.

Of course, I cannot control the actions of others. I can only control my actions. My purpose in writing this book is to help make me a better person.

If in the process, I help someone else, that is a bonus. In the introduction, I mentioned an associate who told me I was responsible for the actions of my team because the buck stops with me. As the owner of the company, I am responsible for what my team does. That much is true. What should I do when one of my team members ignores the values? The options available to me are to teach and train, reprimand, and in some cases, terminate. I choose to teach and train. Will I, from time-to-time, reprimand or terminate? Of course, I will, but that will be one of my last resorts.

I keep going back to what the late Zig Ziglar said. "You can get everything in life you want if you will help enough other people get what they want." I want my Rooter Hero team members to enjoy their lives to the fullest. I want them to reach financial freedom, and I want them to be heroes who hold the families we serve in the highest esteem.

I want so much, and yet I understand that nothing will happen until I first work on myself.

John

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Here's How Putting Values First Can Help You Have Principle-Driven Leadership...

In his third book, John Akhoian, owner of Rooter Hero Plumbing, shares the values that drive his company and shaped his life. John grew up in challenging circumstances. His father had a heart attack and died when he was seventeen. John grew up angry. He was angry at his father for deserting him and for leaving him to support his family. John never graduated with his high school class and found himself in and out of trouble.

In Values First, John explores the moral code that helped him overcome obstacles and live the life he always wanted. He breaks down each value and offers anecdotes that illustrate his point. He married Tamar, the woman of his dreams, and has two wonderful boys, Andrew and Christian. John has built a plumbing empire and has goals of expanding nationally. John attributes his success to the values you will discover in this book.

John is a firm believer in Zig Ziglar's philosophy, "You can get everything in life you want if you will help enough other people get what they want." John's wish is that the values in this book will bring you joy, happiness, and financial security. By helping you realize your dreams, John is convinced he will continue to achieve his.

Values First is packed with the knowledge and wisdom of the ages. John is a firm believer that living the values in this book will change your life for the better. John Akhoian is the author of Creating 99-Millionaires. He is the owner of Rooter Hero Plumbing, with locations in California and Arizona.

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