

# Building a values-led business - Why it matters to every generation

*“We don’t want people to conform – we want them to thrive.”*

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What does it really take to revitalise and reimagine the internal values of a legacy organisation, one with more than a century of history? For Lien Potgieter, head of marketing and communication at Medihelp Medical Scheme, the answer lay not in top-down directives but in a bold cultural experiment rooted in co-creation, deep reflection, and radical authenticity.

What unfolded was more than a strategic exercise. It was a human-centred transformation, a “culture hackathon” designed not just to rearticulate values but also to reawaken them, personally and collectively.



Lien Potgieter

## **The vision begins: Culture as an inside job**

“I created my own personal first vision board five years ago,” Lien shares. “It had a vibrant bunch of flowers in the centre. When I made a new one for our culture sessions, the flowers appeared again. That simple visual spoke volumes about my enduring values – colour, beauty, and simplicity interwoven with complexity. It reminded me how powerful our inner drivers truly are.”

That vision board wasn't just a personal reflection; it became the seed for a broader organisational shift. Li initiated Medihelp's first culture hackathon: a multi-session journey designed to co-create a renewed vision mission, and set of core values. But unlike traditional values exercises, this process started with the self.

Fifteen team members from across the organisation stepped forward, forming a cross-functional collective of culture architects. "From the outset, we explored our WHY, our WHAT, and critically, our HOW," explain Lien. "It was about alignment, not just aspiration."

### **When employees become culture architects**

Rather than imposing values from the top, the process invited every participant to show up with authenticity and voice. This intentional shift reflects what progressive organisational theory has long suggested. When employees are engaged in defining the culture, they are far more likely to embody it.

And the data backs this up. "Over Medihelp's 120-year history, the world of work has shifted dramatically," Lien notes. "Today, innovation stems from diversity – in identity, experience, and perspective. And as Richard Barrett argues in *Building a Values-Driven Organization*, the most successful companies are those that build from the inside out, with values as the foundation."

The team's early work involved defining each person as a "microculture", an ecosystem of beliefs, values, and emotional drivers. "We asked ourselves, what does our ideal life look like? Each person created a vision board and shared it with the group. That experience alone brought us into deep emotional resonance with one another," says Lien. "We started to see the company not just as a structure, but as a living, evolving community."

### **From micro to macro: Aligning the personal with the organisational**

With personal values now on the table, the team transitioned to defining Medihelp's macroculture. What happens when personal values clash with organisational ones? How do we reconcile the tension between who we are and where we work?

"These are essential questions," Lien reflects. "We don't want people to conform – we want them to thrive. That means our values must reflect the shared essence of who we are and who we're becoming."

Through dialogue and debate, six candidate values emerged: passion, excellence, co-creation, compassion, collaboration, and transparency. A democratic vote helped weed them down to four. "Our final four values will serve as the compass for everything, from hiring to decision-making, from customer experience to internal collaboration," explains Lien.

### **From six to four: The final values**

Here's how the vote unfolded:

- Passion – 15%
- Excellence – 21%
- Co-creation – 4%
- Compassion – 18%
- Collaboration – 16%

- Transparency – 22%

“The Board of Trustees approved the values. Now we are moving into full implementation, embedding our values into language, visuals, systems, and behaviour,” Lien says. “This isn’t a branding exercise. It’s the blueprint for a values-led organisation, one where trust is cultivated, people are seen, and purpose drives everything.”

## The future is personal – and purposeful

The evolution of Medihelp’s culture marks more than a change of words on a wall. It’s a powerful case study of what it means to move from compliance to commitment, from traditional corporate culture to something more human, more intentional, and more alive.

“This is how we build brand trust from the inside out,” concludes Lien. “Not by telling people what to believe but by listening, reflecting, and co-creating something worth believing in.”

## Sidebar

### Generational perspectives on values

Medihelp’s values transformation is particularly resonant in a multigenerational workforce. For **Millennials (born 1981-1996)**, value alignment is non-negotiable. They prioritise purpose-driven work, emphasising social responsibility and ethics. **Generation Z (born 1997-2012)** takes this even further, seeking out employers committed to social and environmental causes. **Generation X (born 1965-1980)**, meanwhile, increasingly valuing integrity and ethical business practices, especially as they ascend into leadership roles. **Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)**, once primarily focused on stability and job security, are now re-evaluating legacy and impact, making values alignment a growing priority.

### More on Lien Potgieter

From Hansard editor to award-winning publications editor, Lien’s career has always been about shaping meaning and bringing beauty to life, whether through words, design, or human connection. With a passion for colour and communication, and a belief in its emotional resonance, she continues to blend strategic creativity with deep empathy. Now leading marketing and communication at Medihelp, she brings a visionary approach to storytelling, branding, and culture-building – one rooted in authenticity, innovation, and human insight.

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