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# PROMISING PRACTICES



## Michigan vocational rehabilitation provider channels Disney, Zappos to create meaningful mission engagement

*By Brad Contento, CARF International*

Mission and value statements are meant to communicate the core philosophies of an organization. They define an organization's essence, its fundamental reason for existing. Yet many organizations face a challenge ensuring that employees don't only see those statements as empty words posted in the lobby, but instead live them every day in interactions with clients.

The human resource department at [Peckham, Inc.](#), a vocational rehabilitation provider with locations throughout Michigan, was tinkering with just such a challenge. "We don't want our core values to just be something that sounds good to management and PR," says Scott Derthick, vice president of human services at Peckham. "We want our staff to be able to touch, feel, and become a part of Peckham's unique culture. We want them to fully understand the bigger picture of why they are working here."

Seeking insight from outside sources, Peckham invited a speaker from Delivering Happiness, a consultant company that teaches the corporate culture of Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh, to discuss its frameworks that can be applied in business environments. Derthick also attended a conference about the business culture of Disney. "One of the things they discussed was that Walt

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[Disney] was a micromanager,” says Derthick. “Not to say that he was looking over employees’ shoulders. Instead, he was meticulous about the experience and values that he expected to be present in each and every interaction with customers.”

Excited about what it had learned from Delivering Happiness and Disney, Peckham began to look for ways to implement the new ideas on company culture. For many years, Peckham was tying its staff bonus to more activity-driven events and outcomes, formerly called “Key Indicators,” which implied more of a business objective. To begin to shift company culture toward a mission-focused mindset, Peckham made the decision to change the incentive for its yearly bonus to be based instead on meaningful engagement with the [company’s mission and values](#). Thus was born the Mission Engagement Experience (MEe) program.

The MEe program is an in-depth employee engagement strategy that has quickly become an integral part of the Peckham company culture. It encourages every staff member, from the executive leader on down, to participate in at least one activity each quarter outside his or her usual realm of responsibility that engages or supports the persons served. The program is highly structured, complete with defined objectives, annual reports, and a consistent visibility among staff. In 2013, six teams comprised the MEe program. Each team was responsible for one of the program goals and offered different opportunities for staff to engage with persons served. The specific goals and activities offered by each MEe team directly related to Peckham’s mission and values. The goals of the six teams in 2013 were defined as Sustainability, Wellness, Advocacy, Asset Building, Inclusion, and Peckham University.

The MEe teams function like mini departments. They each include a Peckham staff member who volunteers as a point of contact and is responsible for monitoring budgets, managing team meetings, quarterly reports to the board, and working with staff to complete activities. Each team also has positions available for subject-matter experts, administrative support, technical support, and even photographers. Peckham staff members can engage in the MEe program as members of a team or as participants in the many activities provided through it. Potential activities include volunteering to help run a company event like the holiday party (Advocacy), teaching persons served to use computer programs such as Microsoft® Word and Excel® (Peckham University), or even making coffee for persons served in the morning (Inclusion).

But the activities themselves are not the most important aspect of the MEe program. In order to fully connect employees with the company philosophy, Peckham asks participants to report on how



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they felt about doing the activity, how it was rewarding for them, and how it furthered the mission of the organization. "When we first started, some employees were getting caught up on specifically what activity they were supposed to do, or when they should be done," says Derthick. "But we are mostly interested in how they feel about engaging in the mission and why they felt it was meaningful. The MEe program allows for so many opportunities to engage; many people are already participating without knowing it. What we want to know is: 'what did you get out of it?'" The responses are published publicly within Peckham so that everyone can read about all the ways the mission is being realized and lived around the company.



*Above: Peckham staff and volunteers serve food to clients at the summer picnic.*

*Example MEe program report: "This was my first picnic with Peckham; for me it was a reaffirmation. There are times in the day to day when frustration builds and I feel that the 'mission' is lost - just happy words. Events like this bring it all back into focus, and I become aware ( again! ) of how very fortunate I am to be a part of something that really is directing its efforts to progressing the concept of humanity to all - because it is the right thing to do."*

Response to the MEe program has been phenomenal. Among staff, there is almost 98 percent engagement with the young program, and people are taking it upon themselves to help coworkers who are having trouble getting involved. Persons served are the beneficiaries of the program, and Peckham receives frequent input from them on the success of each activity and about what they would like to see in the future. In 2014, [CARF International](#) recognized the MEe program for exemplary conformance in business practices. The positive responses have encouraged Peckham to continue along the path of mission engagement, and even to consider updating the

official company values. It is looking into developing a set of "committable core values" that describes the values that individual employees should strive to meet, rather than the more overarching values of the company as a whole. "We want to create values that encourage people, on an individual level, to 'step over the red rope.'" says Derthick. "At the big award shows, there is the red carpet that is partitioned off from the crowd of fans and media by a red velvet rope. Most celebrities will stay on the other side and walk by. But some will step over the red rope and engage with their fans on a real level. That is the trait we want to see in all members of our staff."

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For further information on the MEe program, please contact Scott Derthick, vice president of human resources at Peckham, at [sderthick@peckham.org](mailto:sderthick@peckham.org).

Visit the Peckham, Inc., website at [www.peckham.org](http://www.peckham.org).

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