WholeStack
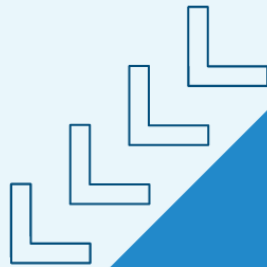## Solutions

THE OWNER'S
MANUAL

Wholestack Solutions Owners' Manual

For too long IT has been focused on technology, not people. Too focused on working *for* technology. Wholestack Solutions (WSS) wants to change that; we believe technology should work for <u>us</u>.

To get there, WSS embraces a counter-intuitive approach to culture. Some may call us strange and unusual; and that's OK by us. This document is about that culture.

Like all great companies, we strive to hire the best and we value integrity, excellence, respect, commitment to learning, and collaboration. We love grit and determination. And if you have a little chip on your shoulder and something to prove? You'll fit in. What is special about WSS, though, is how much we:

1. **encourage employees to "own it" via independent decision-making by employees**
2. **commit to learning & share information openly, broadly, and deliberately**
3. **are extraordinarily candid with each other & provide real-time feedback**
4. **seek to find the right people for our bus and keep them**
5. **own it and unleash potential**

Our ultimate goal is **unleashing potential**. To get there, we need great people working together to **Own It**. With this approach, we will become a more flexible, fun, stimulating, creative, collaborative, and successful organization.

WSS Values

Below are our organizational values, the specific behaviors and skills we care about most. The more these values sound like you, and describe people you want to work with, the more likely you will thrive at WSS.

Make A Commitment, Keep A Commitment

- You set clear, agreed upon expectations
- You do what you say you were going to do
- You provide updates
- You manage expectations
- You Own your deliverables and your misses

Progress Over Perfection

- You listen well and seek to understand before reacting
- You maintain calm poise in stressful situations to draw out the clearest thinking
- You identify root causes, and get beyond treating symptoms
- You focus on moving forward, not being perfect
- You are good at using data to inform your intuition
- You make decisions based on the long term, not near term

Natural Curiosity, Learning & Share The Knowledge Love

- You learn rapidly, eagerly, and willingly
- You contribute outside of your specialty
- You seek connections that others miss
- You seek to understand our customers, and how we serve them
- You seek alternate perspectives
- You make time to help colleagues
- You keep us nimble by simplifying the complex and making hard work easier work
- You commit to creating, using and sharing organizational knowledge

Own It & Radical Transparency

- You say what you think, when it's in the best interest of WSS, even if it is uncomfortable
- You make tough decisions without agonizing
- You take smart risks and are open to possible failure
- You question actions inconsistent with our values
- You provide candid, helpful, timely feedback to colleagues that seeks to build them up, not tear them down
- You admit mistakes freely and openly

Meet People Where They Are

- You care intensely about our success and our Customers' success
- You are tenacious and optimistic
- You are always trying to 'find a way'
- You find ways to coach, guide and help others based on their reality, not yours

Accept, Adapt and Overcome

- You accept reality for what it is
- You adjust your thinking and tactics based on current realities
- You are open-minded in search of great ideas
- You challenge preconceived beliefs and view points in your way
- You re-conceptualize issues to discover solutions to hard problems
- You refuse to be quick-to-quit

It's easy to write values; it's harder to live them. We want everyone to help each other live the values and hold each other responsible for being the right people on the bus.

We work hard to get people to give each other professional, constructive feedback - up, down and across the organization - on a continual basis. People frequently ask others, "What could I be doing better?" and themselves, "What feedback have I not yet shared?"

We believe we will learn faster and be better if we can make giving and receiving feedback less stressful and a more normal part of work life.

Feedback is a continuous part of how we communicate and work with one another versus an occasional formal exercise. We build trust by being selfless in giving feedback to our colleagues, even if it is uncomfortable to do so. Feedback helps us to avoid sustained misunderstandings. Feedback is more easily exchanged if there is a strong underlying relationship and trust between people. We actively help people learn how to do this at WSS through coaching and modeling the behaviors we want to see in every employee.

The Right People On The Bus

The Right People On The Bus is about *all* of your colleagues living our values; and all of your colleagues holding each other accountable to those values. Our version of the great workplace is not big gyms, fancy offices, or frequent parties. Our version of the great workplace is a collective group of people in pursuit of unleashing potential, learning, improving, having fun and being successful.

To have an entire company comprised of "the right people on the bus" (rather than just a few small groups) is challenging. Unquestionably, we have to hire well. We also have to foster commitment to our values.

One might assume that with "The Right People On The Bus" focus, people are afraid of making mistakes. In fact, it's the opposite. We try all kinds of things and make plenty of mistakes as we search for improvement.

Within WSS, collaboration and trust work well because your colleagues are both exceptionally skilled at what they do, and at working well with others. In describing **Natural Curiosity, Learning, & Share The Knowledge Love** we say "*You make time to help colleagues. You share information openly and proactively*." We want new colleagues to feel very welcome and get all the support they need to be effective.

On WSS's "Bus", we have a strict "no a-hole policy." The cost to teamwork is just too high. Our view is that brilliant people are also capable of decent human interactions, and we insist upon that. When highly capable people work together in a collaborative context, they inspire each other to be more creative, more productive, and ultimately more successful as a team than they could be as a collection of individuals.

Succeeding on WSS's "Bus" is about making hard work, easier work. Of course, to be great, most of us have to put in considerable effort, but busy and long hours is not how we measure or talk about a person's contribution.

Autonomy and Responsibility

There are companies where people ignore trash on the floor in the office, leaving it for someone else to pick it up, and there are companies where people in the office lean down to pick up the trash they see, as they would at home. We try hard to be the latter, a company where everyone feels a sense of responsibility to do the right thing to help the company at every juncture.

Picking up the trash is the metaphor for taking care of problems, small and large, and never thinking "that's not my job." We don't have rules about picking up the real or metaphoric trash. We try to create a sense of "Own It" so that this behavior comes naturally. We believe in it so much that we created a value: **"Own It."**

Our goal is to inspire people more than manage them, empower them to act in our customers' best interest. We trust our teams to do what they think is best for WSS —

giving them lots of autonomy and information in support of their decisions. In turn, this generates a sense of responsibility and self-discipline that drives us to do great work that benefits the company.

We believe that people thrive on being trusted, on autonomy, and on being able to make a difference. So we foster autonomy and empowerment wherever we can.

We work to have a company of self-disciplined people who discover and solve problems without being told to do so.

There are a few important exceptions to our **Own It** philosophy. We are strict about ethical issues and safety issues. Harassment of employees or customers are zero tolerance issues, for example. Some information such as keeping our customers' technology information safe, have strict controls around access.

Some processes are about making hard work, easier work - rather than error avoidance, and we like processes that help us get more done. One such process we do well is effective scheduled meetings. We have a regular cadence of many types of meetings; we strive to start and end on time and have well-prepared agendas. We use these meetings to learn from each other and get more done, rather than to prevent errors or approve decisions.

Coaching not Control

We want employees to be great independent decision makers, and to only consult their manager when they are unsure of the right decision. The leader's job at every level is to set clear boundaries and provide insights so that others have the right information to make generally great decisions.

We strive to develop good decision-making muscles everywhere in our company. We pride ourselves on how few, not how many, decisions senior management makes. We don't want hands-off management, though. Each leader's role is to coach, set boundaries, provide insights and to be informed of what is happening. But unlike the micro-manager, the goal of knowing those details is not to change certain small decisions, but to learn how to adjust coaching so more decisions are made well.

There are some minor exceptions to "coaching not control," such as an urgent situation in which there is no time to think about proper guardrails and principles, or when a new team member hasn't yet absorbed enough training to be confident, or when it's recognized that the wrong person is in a decision-making role.

High Speed – Low Drag

As companies grow, they often become highly centralized, inflexible, and slow. Symptoms include:

- Senior management is involved in many small decisions
- There are numerous cross-departmental buy-in meetings to socialize tactics
- Pleasing other internal groups takes precedence over pleasing customers
- The organization is highly coordinated and less prone to error, but slow and frustrating

We avoid this by being high speed – low drag. We spend lots of time debating strategy together, and then trust each other to execute on tactics without prior approvals.

The success of a "High Speed – Low Drag" work environment is dependent upon the collaborative efforts of high performance individuals and effective context. Ultimately, the end goal is to grow the business for bigger impact while increasing flexibility and agility. We seek to be High Speed – Low Drag.

Unleashing Potential

We do not seek to preserve our culture — we seek to improve it. Every person who joins us helps to shape and evolve the culture further. We find new ways to Unleash our Potential. Every few years we can feel a real difference in how much more effectively we are operating than in the past. We are learning faster than ever because we have more dedicated people with diverse perspectives trying to find better ways for our talented team to work together more cohesively, nimbly and effectively.

Summary

As we wrote in the beginning, what is special about WSS is how much we:

1. **encourage independent decision-making by employees**
2. **commit to learning & share information openly, broadly, and deliberately**
3. **are extraordinarily candid with each other & provide real-time feedback**
4. **seek to find the right people for our bus and keep them**
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Finally

The path to 'owning it' and unleashing potential rests in this final quote:

Simplify the complex in order to redefine what's possible.