



TOPICS COVERED
// Program Advice & Strategy

As chair of the board of directors for Thrivent Financial, I've had the privilege of helping guide the organization as it takes its corporate culture to the next level and builds trust among members, employees and management through the ethical treatment of one another. As a financial services organization, establishing trust is the key to maintaining and serving our members. I can tell you firsthand that when the board, executives, leaders and employees all work together, an ethical corporate culture can create a thriving organization.

So, how can you create a culture based on ethics? Here's how we've approached it at Thrivent Financial.

Build a foundation with your mission, vision and values

At Thrivent, we have the benefit of our history on our side. Our organization is a fraternal benefit society that began as a way for Lutherans to pool their resources to help one another in the event a family experienced the untimely death of a breadwinner. Today, that vision has grown to a Fortune 500 financial services membership organization that serves more than 2.3 million members nationwide – at our core, our mission remains unchanged. We help families be wise with money and live generously.

About four years ago, we decided to refine our mission, vision and values. During this process, the board of directors worked closely with Thrivent senior management to develop what we call *The Thrivent Way*. *The Thrivent Way* is incorporated into all we do as we serve our members and society. It states:

We are a membership organization of Christians, and our members are our owners. Our purpose is to serve our members and society by guiding both to be wise with money and live generously. We believe that all we have is a gift from God and that generosity is an expression of faith. We succeed when our members, their families and their communities thrive. We value our relationships, so we will: Be trustworthy in character and competence, Act like owners and treat each other as owners, and Live balanced and generous lives.

A WORTHY INVESTMENT

Taking Corporate Culture to the Next Level

Written by Dick Moeller

No one can deny that ethical behavior is integral to the success of an organization; without it, poor decisions can ruin an organization's reputation and severely impact financial results. When an organization creates a baseline expectation for ethical behavior, it can begin to realize business results and protect its reputation. However, when an organization goes further and builds a foundation that extols ethical behavior, the organization's corporate culture will flourish. Employees and leaders alike will feel empowered to make ethical business decisions, report unethical conduct, and identify, promote and reward ethical behavior.

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You may have noticed that nowhere in *The Thrivent Way* do we specifically call out ethics. Rather than use the word "ethics", we instead defined its essence. The *Thrivent Way* provides parameters for our employees to make ethical decisions and is visible throughout our offices. It truly is in our DNA, and it guides all of our decisions.

Set an example

If leaders live *The Thrivent Way* and champion ethical culture, employees will feel empowered to always do the right thing. Thrivent's CEO was our voice for creating *The Thrivent Way*. Executives had and continue to have conversations with their teams about the importance of ethical behavior. It's not uncommon to participate in an employee meeting and hear messages about the importance of ethical behavior from our senior leaders on stage.

The board of directors has taken an active role in ethics at the organization. Thrivent has a Code of Conduct Office with dedicated staff, and the board of directors has oversight. The board believes ethical behavior is foundational to building trust with our members. To demonstrate our

commitment to ethics, the board takes the same Code of Conduct training required for all Thrivent employees.

As part of the Code of Conduct Office, our workforce can use the resources at thriventcodeofconduct.com. This includes an external hotline that can take concerns at any time via web form or phone. We also have internal communication channels where individuals can raise questions or concerns. The Code of Conduct Office has made Thrivent's Code of Conduct and other resources available publicly because we want to further the conversation with others and share how we are continuing to build our culture through the resources we provide.

These examples of leadership add up – we find that our culture promotes a greater service to our members, propelled by *The Thrivent Way*.

Create a stage for conversation

We are committed to offering training resources, manager toolkits, and opportunities to report unethical behavior and ask questions in a variety of ways for our workforce.

Our research at Thrivent tells us when employees are faced with dilemmas, they usually have a conversation with their direct manager. Recognizing that managers are an important part of creating and reinforcing an ethical culture, we created a manager toolkit with resources to help guide them when employees present questions. We also provide training for all managers so they are equipped to recognize when questions or concerns need to be elevated or reported. Ultimately, if managers are equipped and confident in handling ethical concerns and questions, our culture will be stronger.

Our Code of Conduct office is active in communicating about our ethical culture. Thrivent's Code of Conduct manager writes periodic blogs and articles for our employee communications channels. Thrivent hosts events with internal and external guest speakers to ensure that we're providing new and interesting ways to think about and promote ethical behavior. When we communicate about ethical behavior, we are sure to lift up real life examples – and not just negative ones. We want to highlight positive ethical deci-

sions and avoid creating an environment that is perceived only as punitive.

Celebrations are another great way to create conversation around ethical behavior. Our internal employee recognition program offers a way for employees to be rewarded for ethical behavior. If someone witnesses an employee demonstrating significant ethical behavior, he or she can nominate that person to receive a monetary award. And of course, we always experience a sense of pride and celebration when Thrivent is named a World's Most Ethical Company.

Start building now

At Thrivent, we know that we must be diligent as we continue to build and maintain a corporate culture that exemplifies ethical behavior. Perhaps your organization is already well on the path to embodying ethical behavior, or maybe you are just beginning the journey of cultural level-setting. Of one thing I am certain: building an ethical culture requires intentionality and persistence, but will bring a ten-fold return on your investment.

Facts & Figures



45 percent of the board directors surveyed reportedly indicate that they lack confidence employees are complying with corporate social media policies.

Source: *What Directors Think 2016 Survey*, conducted by Spencer Stuart and NYSE Governance Services.

Author Biography

Frank H. (Dick) Moeller, Austin, Texas, has served on the board of directors for Thrivent Financial since May 2005. Moeller is currently Chair of the board and a member of the Executive Committee of the board.

Moeller serves as founding principal of Enovate Enterprises, a consulting firm focused on assisting entrepreneurs, founders, companies and organizations to achieve their full potential. In addition, Moeller is the founder and president of Water to Thrive, a faith-based nonprofit organization that works to bring fresh water to rural Africa.

Moeller has served on the boards of two public companies, seven private companies, two foundations, eight not-for-profit corporations and his church. He attends Triumphant Love Lutheran Church in Austin.