

Introduction

Within my Business Management degree I was required to take a class in Business Ethics, where I learned about ethical leadership. I had the opportunity to apply what I learned in the classroom to real-life experiences through an internship I completed in the Fall of 2019 with the Better Business Bureau Serving Northern Colorado and Wyoming in which I was paired with two businesses nominated for the annual Torch Award. My task was to research and interview each business to observe the ways in which they excel in ethical leadership based on a criteria known as the TRUST! Principles. TRUST! is an acronym that stands for Transformation at the Top, Reinforce and Build, Unite the Team, Steer Performance, Treasure People, and Enthusiastically Reinvest(!) (Better Business Bureau Serving Northern Colorado and Wyoming, 2020, p. 5-10). Using this process to put into practice what I had learned about ethical leadership allowed me to dive really deep into each company, its people, and its values. This report details the ways in which one of the businesses I worked with, Exodus Moving & Storage, goes above and beyond in achieving these six principles, and why Exodus can be viewed as the model for ethical leadership for businesses across all industries.

Exodus Moving & Storage is a Colorado-based company that has been family owned and operated since 1996, and currently employs 48 team members. They provide superior moving services locally, long distance, and worldwide. They also provide local storage services to the region. Their mission statement captures their passion and dedication to their work: Peace of mind, all in one piece. Exodus was founded by Ilan Levy, who still enthusiastically runs the company today. This company exceeds the norm in emphasizing customer and company relationships, servant leadership, giving back to their community, and dedication to sustainability, among countless other practices.

Transformation at the Top

Ilan Levy, President of Exodus Moving & Storage, has implemented a code of ethics into the culture that is simultaneously simple and comprehensive: they are a Professional Team of Real People Creating Solutions. Each piece of this code has important and valuable meaning to Ilan, the team, and their customers. As a Professional Team, customers can count on each member to be experienced, qualified, and respectful. Exodus hires full time staff rather than temporary or contract workers, an uncommon practice in the moving industry, which creates a cohesive team of people who are dedicated to each other and the business. Real People assures customers that they aren't working with a corporation, but rather a team of individuals who are dedicated to building lasting relationships and fostering trust. It also acts as a promise to customers that there will always be a real human answering the phone, not a robot or automated machine, solidifying the sense that concerns are being heard and met intimately and efficiently. Exodus also acknowledges the qualitative difference between solving problems and Creating Solutions, and are passionate about the latter. Out-of-the-box solutions are brainstormed and applied to ensure that any and all issues aren't just 'dealt with', they are eradicated completely. They begin every conversation with "How can we help you?", a strategy that lets customers know that their needs are the first priority.

Exodus recently faced an ethical dilemma that put their creative solution skills to the test. A customer's closing fell through and they were unable to deliver the belongings on the scheduled date. Luckily, they had the means to store the customer's belongings while waiting for closing. However, Exodus was unable to deliver the items the day the closing was completed, as their operations team was at one hundred percent capacity. The decision they faced was to either pull crew members from other jobs to complete this one, which would put all of those other jobs

behind schedule, or to wait until the next day to move the customer's belongings. After discussions with their team and a heart-felt candid conversation with the client, they decided to honor their pre-existing promises to the customers booked on that day and delivered the delayed mover's belongings the next day. In this tricky situation, they were successfully able to meet the needs of all of their customers to the best of their ability.

Exodus currently has three American Moving & Storage Association (AMSA) Certified Move Consultants on staff, and the president himself possesses a commercial driver's license (CDL) class A, proving that this company is comprised of a team of experienced and qualified professionals. Their estimates are free with no obligation, accurate, and honest. Employees have the utmost confidence in their supervisors' knowledge and leadership.

The company's founder and president, Ilan, is what really makes Exodus stand out. Ilan is not a traditional boss. He grew up in a kibbutz in Israel, which is essentially a collective community in which everyone works together to provide for one another in terms of farming, irrigation, raising cattle, and caring for the children. Growing up in such a unique environment and culture has led Ilan to strongly value relationships, community, and giving back. Multiple employees have described him as "caring to a fault", based on the fact that he rarely says no to any call for help. At one Estes Board of Realtors event, Ilan noticed an elderly woman dropping off her handicapped husband by the door. He offered to park her car for her so that she could help her husband inside. The woman was sure Ilan intended to steal her vehicle, as this level of kindness isn't encountered every day.

It is safe to assume that nobody else thought to assist this couple in this way, but that is who Ilan is. He truly values people over business and genuinely desires to help his fellow humans in any way he can, regardless of his own personal or business gains. Instead of working

in an office like most company owners, he works as a crew member day in and day out. By doing this, Ilan has gained incomparable experience, the ability to empathize with his staff, gauge customer experience, and continually earn the respect of his crew members. He plays a big role in making Exodus such an enjoyable and fulfilling place to work. 'Ilan' can be used synonymously with 'Exodus', because he is the culture of the company. A few of his trademark sayings are "Thank you for being awesome", "Bye in the meantime", "You need to show them more love", "Good morning, America", and "See you later, alligator". Ilan has a big heart, a big sense of humor, and big optimism, which quite literally makes his company a triple threat.

Remarkably, a number of employees who left the company in the past have since decided to come back, like Kelly Brueck, marketing and PR specialist. Kelly accepted a job with the Better Business Bureau in 2017 and returned to Exodus three months ago because she, like others, was unable to find a boss as genuine and a culture as unified as Exodus's. Kelly recalls a time when Ilan happened to be driving behind her and noticed her tail light was out. He signaled for her to pull over and told her to go to Houska Automotive to get the tail light fixed and have her oil changed. This is just one example of how much Ilan truly cares for the safety and well-being of his team.

Reinforce and Build

Exodus is very passionate about building trust both externally and internally; in other words, with both their customers and their employees. Building trust with customers is important in any industry, but especially in the moving industry. A mover's job is to enter a client's home and handle their belongings. Most people don't like to let just anybody into their private space and around their personal items, which is why building a relationship of trust is key to keeping the customer at ease. Moving day is a stressful day no matter what, but the Exodus staff are

experts in easing this stress by acting professional and positive, ensuring belongings are handled with care and respect, and moving everything efficiently and accurately. A Certified Move Consultant always meets with the customer in person to provide accurate and honest estimates. Exodus even suggests money-saving tips so that the customer stays within their budget. Their fundamental question “How can we help?” isn’t just a formality, it’s a daily practice. The ultimate goal is to achieve customer relationships, not just monetary transactions. In Kelly’s words, Exodus follows the standards of trust by “advertising honestly, telling the truth, being transparent, honoring their promises, being responsive, safeguarding the privacy of the consumer, and embodying integrity”. Exodus was recently awarded first place in the “Reader’s Choice Best of NOCO” category of *NOCO Style* magazine’s 2019 issue, which is a tangible example of the trust they have built with their Colorado family.

To build trust internally with employees, management makes sure to use effective communication about expectations and responsibilities. If ever the code of ethics is compromised, the situation is addressed promptly. Ilan does not hesitate to talk with his team in which they discuss why the problem occurred, what needs to change, and how to realize that change. Instead of being angry, he tries to be empathetic, to lead the employee to an understanding of what went wrong, and to work with them to ensure both the company’s and the employee’s success. This goes back to their code of ethics, in which they aim to create lasting solutions rather than quickly solving problems.

Unite the Team

As President, Ilan’s commitment to his employees results in their dedication to the company. Some employees have been a part of the Exodus family for over fifteen years. Ilan’s passion for helping others is contagious, and causes employees to be motivated by the

opportunity to help others rather than by the promise of a paycheck. Their “How can we help?” attitude isn’t just applied to customers, but to each other as well. They are united around helping the customer, each other, their community, and the company all at once.

The central focus for the leadership team is to ensure that every member of their work family feels recognized and encouraged for their good performance. They have implemented the use of Rockstar Cards, which are cards awarded to employees for stellar customer reviews and can be traded in for cash bonuses. They also offer bonuses for the first and last five days of every month, which are their busiest times. During busy times there is little room to correct errors or to complete jobs late, so employees are rewarded for being on time and doing their work correctly as this ensures the entire operation runs smoothly. Exodus also utilizes verbal recognition. This is done both face-to-face and through company-wide emails that praise specific employees for going above and beyond.

Along with promoting encouragement, Exodus also aims to promote work/life balance, especially for their long-distance drivers. In general, some drivers enjoy the long hours, and don’t mind being on the road so often. They are also given the autonomy to accept or decline a long-distance driving job, so they don’t get burnt out with too many hours. Also, the long distance jobs are usually naturally spaced out thanks to the ebb and flow of moving season. For example, most people moving long distance do it in the summer versus the winter, since road conditions are generally better. Therefore, while the summer is usually fairly busy for long distance drivers, the winter provides a resting period for them.

Steer Performance

Exodus is very diligent in establishing goals for every job they have. From deciding whether the job is commercial or residential, to allocating resources such as trucks and people, to

ensuring the jobs are finished on time and accurately, the goal-setting process is very comprehensive. In order to achieve their goals, they have implemented an online company schedule that includes the date and time of every moving job that is booked and how many crew members are needed for each job. This system allows them to avoid over or understaffing a job, and booking too many jobs at once. Their trucks have two or three doors to make access to different items easier, and they are able to create barriers in the trucks, allowing them to load multiple orders on one truck, which saves time and driving staff.

This company also establishes progress goals for their employees. They are willing to hire team members with no prior experience or driving knowledge, and offer hourly wage increases for each new skill learned and mastered. These learned skills include how to correctly and effectively package and move different materials, obtaining a CDL license, preparing contract documents and other basic paperwork, preparing advanced paperwork, loading for long-distance moves, and specialty moving procedures. This motivates employees to stay focused, to work their hardest, and to always have a willingness to learn and grow.

Treasure People

When hiring new team members, Exodus pays less attention to experience and focuses more on a person's personality, attitude, willingness to learn, and ability to take direction. It's easier to teach the job than it is to teach character. This guarantees that they are hiring people that share the same values as them and will work to promote those values, rather than people who may already be experts in the field but don't share the same vision. As previously mentioned, they hire full-time workers rather than contract or temporary workers. This gives everyone a sense of purpose and makes them feel like they belong with the company because they serve an important role. The company website boasts "We offer more than just a moving

job! We offer a place on our team!”), which fosters commitment to the organization. Their website also claims “We know exactly who we have on our team”, and this is 100% true. Ilan knows everybody’s name and has a genuine interest in their welfare. He checks up on everybody who calls in sick; he answers phone calls in the middle of the night and asks “What can I do?”; he calls members of his support staff at the end of every work day to thank them for their hard work. Ilan’s heart is two sizes bigger than the average person’s, a quality that not many business owners possess.

Exodus values not only the happiness of their employees, but their safety as well. Their mantra for maintaining safety is “don’t take risks”. They don’t do anything that risks the safety of the employee or the safety of the customer’s belongings. If a piece of furniture is too heavy for them to move with their equipment, they will hire the appropriate company that can help instead of endangering their employees. Sometimes furniture can’t be moved for other reasons. For example, there have been instances where they can’t fit a piece of furniture through a doorway or hallway, in which case they explain to the customer that they don’t want to compromise the safety of the belonging and give the customer the option of signing a waiver that states they understand the risk and want to proceed anyway or leaving the piece behind either forever or for another company to move. Worker’s compensation is available to anyone injured on the job, but they strive to avoid this by not taking risks in all situations.

They also offer very competitive and generous benefits for their employees. After sixty days of employment, employees are eligible to receive health, vision, and dental coverage. After one year of employment, they have earned one week of paid time off. They also offer a 3% IRA retirement match. The most impressive benefit is after two years of employment, the company will contribute \$2,000 towards a down payment on a home. Ilan believes that everyone should

have a home (and has even opened his own home to employees in the past) which is why they provide this generous benefit. Overall, their philosophy is every team member is equal and receives the same benefits.

Enthusiastically Reinvest!

Exodus Moving & Storage is very focused on their brand. As one employee said “If it’s the right thing to do, Ilan will do it”. He never says no, and is committed to being ethical and putting the welfare of others over money. Their brand, summed up in three words, is “we can help”, and promotes so many concepts that are rare in the business world today, like passion, humility, generosity, and an anti-corporate culture. They have found that people are willing to pay more for better service, and they provide the best service.

Exodus has gotten very involved in its Colorado community over the years. It seems impossible that one company can do so much. Ilan says, “There is nobody that does more than we do, and I am proud of that.” Ilan and his wife Carrie are members of their local Rotary board, which provides them with many opportunities to stay involved. Exodus partners with eight realtors and six chambers, believes in supporting local businesses, and helps an unbelievable number of nonprofits, including the Humane Society and Pianos Around Town. They also donated supplies to and were very involved in the relief efforts for the city of Estes when it was experiencing floods. Last month they received an email from House of Neighborly Service requesting a truck and driver to assist with a food drive, which of course they provided. The email included the statement, “I know you are big supporters of our community, so thank you even if you can’t help with this request!” The NOCO community is familiar with Exodus’s dedication and grateful for their willingness to help.

Exodus sponsors numerous programs in their community, including KidsPak, Adopt a Family, and Rise Against Hunger. KidsPak is an outreach program in which food banks provide food bags to underprivileged students to take home in the evenings. Every Wednesday Exodus commits a truck and a driver to deliver the food bags from the food banks to multiple grade schools in the area. Adopt a Family is an annual program in which the Chamber buys \$5,000 worth of gifts, and with the help of businesses like Exodus, spends a day wrapping all the gifts, and then delivers the gifts to disadvantaged families. In this year's campaign for Rise Against Hunger, Ilan worked alongside forty-nine other Rotary volunteers to package 10,152 meals to be distributed to schoolchildren in Southeast Asia. He even offered the Exodus Moving & Storage warehouse to be used as the packaging location. Again, Ilan will help his community any way he can. As one employee put it, "when you give back to your community, it gives back to you". Building relationships has become their most useful strategy in generating business and building their brand of trust in their community.

Exodus has also implemented numerous sustainability practices. This includes reusing and recycling cardboard boxes. They offer to pick boxes up from customer's homes when they finish unpacking. They have also started to use reusable plastic totes instead of cardboard boxes to pack non-fragile items. Even little things go a long way: rubber bands are used in place of tape, carts and commercial bins are used in place of boxes to move furniture, office staff uses reusable coffee cups. As often as they can they use one big truck rather than two smaller ones and combine separate moves onto one truck to cut down on CO2 emissions. All of their lights and electronics are powered off at night to conserve energy. A central location was chosen for their headquarters to encourage employees to walk, bike, or take public transit to work instead of driving. They even tried to convert a truck to run on vegetable oil, although after two years of

effort they concluded that the practice wasn't practical. Obviously, Exodus is very passionate about green moving, and was even awarded the Green Affiliate of the Year award by the Fort Collins Board of Realtors in 2010.

Conclusion

Exodus Moving & Storage is more than just a moving company. It is an organization comprised of truly kind and caring people, led by one of the most generous and passionate people one could meet. Ilan's insatiable desire to help whoever he can however he can in the midst of a growing popularity for advancing self-interests is inspiring and refreshing. They have demonstrated, in all six areas of the TRUST! Principles, a firm dedication to business ethics and values, and have proved themselves as a role model for businesses in any industry.

Throughout the process of this internship and completing this project, it has become clear to me that ethical leadership is not just about the business itself or its practices, it is also largely determined by the character of the people within the business. As this report has shown, Exodus Moving & Storage focuses a lot on its people and the President has incredibly admirable character, which is what has made them so successful, more so than what they actually do as a business.

Bibliography

Ethics Scholar Toolkit. Better Business Bureau Serving Northern Colorado and Wyoming, Fall

2020.