

# Company Core: what stays, what changes

MODEL

## Company Core

BUILT ON

Built to Last (J. Collins, J. Porras) · Start with Why (S. Sinek)

**Goal.** This template helps you write down why your company exists and what should stay in it, even when you change the offer, the prices or the name. It separates the core from the things you can change without regret. It ends with three rules you use to say “no” to changes, jobs and people that don't fit.

**In 15 minutes.** After this you have a one-page draft and one rule, not a signed document. The time is our estimate, not measured. You need a sheet of paper and a pen. The order follows Sinek's three circles: why, how, what.

1. **Why (field 2), 4 minutes.** Write “We do ... for ...”. Ask “why does it matter?” five times and finish with: “So ...”. The purpose is a belief or a cause, not making money.
2. **How (field 3), 3 minutes.** Write at most two values, as actions (“We say straight out when ...”). For each, answer: will it stay if it costs you a client or money? If not, cross it out.
3. **What (field 5), 3 minutes.** List what you sell today. Split the page into two columns: left “stays” (the purpose and values from steps 1 and 2), right “can change” (offer, prices, name, tools). What you sell is the proof of the purpose, not the purpose itself.
4. **One rule (field 6), 3 minutes.** Finish one sentence: “We test every change with one question: does it touch anything in the left column?” or “We don't take jobs that ...”.
5. **Decision, 2 minutes.** Write one line: “I decide that ... Who ... By when ... I will check ...”. For example: “I decide that our purpose stays and the offer can change. Who: me, for every change to the offer. By when: from today. I will check: in 30 days, how many changes went through this question.”

The full version below adds your path, the big 10-year goal and the signature after 30 days.

**Instructions (full version)** (60 to 90 minutes of work, then 30 days to think it over and 15 minutes to sign; this is our estimate)

1. Start with facts, not slogans. Write down your path and three decisions from the last 12 months that cost you something (field 1).
2. Write what you do and for whom, and ask “why does it matter?” five times. If you end up at “we're saving the world,” take a step back (field 2).
3. Write down at most three values. For each one, answer: will it stay if it costs you a client or money? If not, it's a strategy, not a value (field 3).
4. Write down a big 10-year goal (field 4). Then sort things into two columns: left “stays,” right “can change” (field 5). Finally, write three rules (field 6).
5. Give the document to one person outside the company to read, put it away for 30 days, and only then sign it (field 7).

## Template fields (it all fits on one A4 page)

| Field                                         | What you write                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Where it came from                         | Three experiences from my path and what they help me see. Three decisions from the last 12 months that cost us something: what, how much, why.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 2. Why we exist                               | "We do ... for ...". Five times "why does it matter?"<br>The purpose in one sentence: "So ...". Check (yes/no): it can't be checked off · it is not a promise to the client ("fast," "cheap," "on time") · it will stay after the product changes · it follows from field 1.                                                                                                                                 |
| 3. Values (at most three, written as actions) | Value · Does it stay when it costs a client or money? (yes/no) · Example from field 1. You work out the details (whom we hire, whom we part ways with) in "Values with Teeth."                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 4. Big 10-year goal                           | The goal and the year (Collins and Porras write about a goal 10 to 30 years out; for a small firm, take 10). How we will know it has been reached.<br>Your rough guess: what percent chance is there that it works? Collins and Porras say such a goal should not be a sure bet, "perhaps" 50 to 70 percent, and you must believe you can do it anyway. What it looks like when it works (3 to 5 sentences). |
| 5. What stays, what changes                   | Two columns, as below. Left: stays no matter what (purpose, values). Right: can change without asking (products, prices, channels, name, tools).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 6. Three rules                                | Changes: "We test every change with one question: does it touch anything in the left column?" Clients and jobs: "We don't take jobs that ...". People: "We bring in a partner, an investor or a key person only if ...". Optional: "We will never do ..., even when it costs us."                                                                                                                            |
| 7. Signature                                  | Date of the draft · who outside the company read it · date of signing (at least 30 days later) · review date (once a year).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

### Field 5 in two columns

| Left column: STAYS | Right column: CAN CHANGE |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
|                    |                          |

**Fictional example (the firm and the numbers are fictional, for this template)** A paint wholesaler, 14 people.

- **1. Where it came from.** The owner painted apartments for 8 years and knows what a redo costs. For 3 years he was a manufacturer's sales rep, so he knows surfaces. The co-owner kept the books at a construction company and knows how crews pay. Decisions: we turned down a developer who wanted the cheapest substitute for 40 apartments (about 60 000 PLN less in sales). We dropped a cheap varnish after three complaints. We gave our regular crews 30 days to pay.
- **2. Why we exist.** We sell paints, varnishes and color matching to renovation crews. Why it matters: the wrong material means redos. Redos eat into the crew's earnings. A small crew lives on referrals. Referrals come from good work. A tradesperson wants to be proud of what they leave behind. Purpose: "So a tradesperson can be proud of every wall they leave behind." Check: it can't be checked off (yes), our promise is next-day delivery, not this purpose (yes), it will stay after the product range changes (yes), it follows from the owner's path (yes).
- **3. Values.** "We say straight out when a paint won't suit the surface": stays (example: the developer). "We deliver what we promised, or we call the day before": stays. "The lowest prices in town": doesn't stay; it's a strategy, crossed out.
- **4. Big 10-year goal.** By 2036, 300 crews in our province buy from us because they do fewer redos (110 today). We will know it by 300 crews making at least two purchases a quarter. My rough guess: about 60 percent. What it looks like: crews call us before they price a job, not after. On Saturdays we run short training sessions on surfaces. Painters recommend us to other painters.
- **5. What stays, what changes.** Left column (stays): the purpose and two values. Right column (can change): brands, product range, prices, the online store, opening hours, the warehouse, the name.
- **6. Three rules.** Changes: an online store for individual customers doesn't touch the left column, so we go ahead, but crews get priority service. Clients: we don't take lowest-price tenders where we would have to supply a substitute that causes redos. People: we bring in a sales manager or any partner only if they want the 10-year goal for crews, not a chain of superstores. Never: we don't sell batches past their date as full-quality goods.
- **7. Signature.** Draft on March 3. Read by the owner of a paint wholesaler in another province. Signed on April 3. Review in March next year.

**From us.** The idea of a core comes from books: Jim Collins and Jerry Porras (*Built to Last*, ch. 11) separate the purpose and values that stay from everything else you may change ("if it's not core, change it"), and Simon Sinek (*Start with Why*, ch. 3) arranges it as three circles: why, how, what. For a small firm we added a limit of three values (Collins and Porras warn against a list longer than five or six), two columns, "stays" and "can change," and three rules you use to say "no."

**When to call us.** Call us if:

- after 15 minutes you have two different answers in field 2 and can't choose one (or you and your partner have two different ones);
- within three months you are changing the name or the offer, or taking on a partner or an investor, and the core is meant to be the basis for that decision;
- you want someone outside the company to read the page and tell you "no" before you sign it.

The first call with us is 30 minutes and free. Bring your sheet.

**Prompt for your AI.** This prompt works in your own ChatGPT, Claude or Gemini account and knows only what you tell it; our own method, built on what your company knows, is what we do in a Diagnosis.

You are a calm coach. Take me through the "Company Core" card, the 15-minute version.

Rules:

1. Ask one question at a time and wait for my answer.
  2. If an answer is vague, ask for a number or an example from my company.
  3. Never invent anything about my company. Ask about what you don't know.
  4. Don't write my purpose or rule. You may offer two options; I choose.
- At the start, tell me: "Do not paste passwords, account numbers or personal data."

Questions: (1) what we do and for whom, then "why does it matter?" five times, ending in "So ..."; (2) two values as actions, and whether they stay when they cost a client or money; (3) what we sell, what stays, what can change; (4) one rule for saying "no".

At the end, write one line: "I decide that ... Who ... By when ... I will check ...".

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The examples in the templates are fictional. The times given with the instructions are our estimates, not measurements.