



A Business Philosophy

By Cate Rae, CEO

Being Widgity

The word 'Widgit', being a unique (and originally mis-spelt) name, has become part of the company's DNA for both staff and customers for many years. Like 'hoover', 'Widgit' can be all things: a noun, a verb, an adjective.

Commonly from customers:

Noun: "I'd like to buy **Widgit**" (our software, not the company)

Noun: "We have **Widgits** all around the school" (the symbols)

Verb: "How should I **Widgit** our timetables?" (add symbols to)

Verb: "We have **Widgited** all our signage" (added symbols to)

Commonly from staff:

Adjective: "That's a really **Widgity** thing to do" (nice, kind, friendly)

Noun: "That goes well with our **Widgityness**" (the quality of being Widgity)

Noun: "It should fit in with our **Widgitness**" (our values and way of being)

It's being '**Widgity**' (or Widgitness) that I'd like to explore. What does this mean, and what is this in practice?

Having worked for Widgit the whole of my working life, I know 'Widgitness' inside out (and also know no different). 'Widgitness' is a quality I really believe in and am trying to grow and nurture for the future; a future that hopefully should well outlive myself.



But what is it?

The people who matter can tell you better than myself.

I asked our staff: What does 'being Widgeity' mean to you?

(A sample of the responses)

Warm, caring and understanding. Having the ability to think out of the box professionally in resolving business issues, but sensitively in understanding our customers too.

I would say it is about being kind, caring people. About wanting the best for our customers and for each other. That support and, dare I say it, love that Widgeit, and Widgeit people, show one another.

'Widgeity' to me encompasses all our core values, but mostly kindness. Saying things like "that's a very Widgeit thing to do" or describing someone as 'Widgeity' to me is expressing that a person, or action, was kind in nature to the point of helping someone selflessly.

For me, Widgeity means absolutely everything stated in our core values. The kindness part stands out for me the most because it really is a KIND company to work for in all aspects. Secondly, the quiriness of Widgeit; the brightness, the buzz and the wow factor!

'Being Widgeity' is to be caring, committed, empathic, inclusive, philanthropic.

I think being 'Widgeity' is about taking the time to listen and responding to needs / requests in a caring and compassionate / appropriate manner (whether that is with staff, customers, clients).

It is about being passionate about the use of symbols and understanding that this is a 'greater driver' than sales / profit / money.

It is about believing in and adhering to the core values, even when this can make decisions difficult.

And so much more . . .

I'm not sure I need to say more. I am very proud that throwing out, what, in many contexts, could be seen as quite a silly question elicited such responses.

Being Widgity is our values

A lot of organisations have a set of values. Sometimes these are important and lived by, and sometimes they are a few pointless words on a wall or brochure. At Widgit, we are our values, which underpin everything we do and the way we act.

When initially exploring our values some years back, our staff, board, shareholders, customers and many of our close partners all contributed to their formulation. They all came back with the same basic principles: Integrity | Quality | Kindness



Integrity

Treating everyone and everything we do in an honest and respectful manner.



Quality

Taking pride in our work and constantly striving to improve and evolve.



Kindness

Acting in a positive, supportive and understanding way towards everyone we work with.

Each of these values takes different efforts and attitudes.

Integrity is both an ethical given and deeper than it might first appear. Be honest, don't lie, don't cheat, don't break the law, act ethically—this should be obvious and easy to uphold. Acting with integrity also means keeping to your word, being trustworthy and reliable, practicing open and honest communication, and taking responsibility for your actions. You do the right thing, even when no-one is watching.

Quality is something to strive for. It is not a given, but a motivator and reward. It should push us to try to be better, in all areas of the business and personally. For a company, I believe that making money for money's sake is not an aim in and of itself. Similarly, for an individual, money itself can't bring the same level of satisfaction and fulfilment as knowing that you are really good at what you do, and that you are helping to create something that makes a difference.

Kindness is the value that actually came through most significantly in all our consultations. This may seem an unusual one for a software business, but it's probably the most important to being Widgity... It is also the hardest one to achieve. To be kind 'always' is not an easy thing to do. When you're focused on an outcome, too busy to stop and think, or just tend to forget to be aware and mindful of others, it takes real effort to embody this value. I believe you have to be 'actively kind' to be truly kind. It takes consciousness and deliberate actions.

But these values *are* worth the effort. They are the bedrock of Widgit's culture and are integral to being part of the Widgit family. Anyone joining Widgit must embody (or strive to embody) these values.

So, what does it mean in practice?

Examples of being Widgity

Finances

It's not all about the money

Yes, we are a commercial business, and we need to make money; but this money is to grow, invest in staff, and to reach more people.

We once had a business analyst develop a report on our finances and they were surprised that historically we have had an almost backwards discount model. Most of our discounts were on individual software sales, not on the large transactions, like most businesses do. This is because it's often the individual symbol users and the parents who struggle to afford to buy our software when it's really needed. We always want to help where symbols can give life-changing support, so we have a bursary scheme that parents and individuals can apply for.

Giving back and being fair

Like most businesses we have shareholders and at the end of every year we give back a proportion of the profits back to them in thanks for their investment. But we also make sure staff receive a reward for their hard work. A year in which we can afford to pay a dividend to shareholders as a result of meeting our revenue goals will also be a year that a staff bonus is paid.

This bonus is paid equally to all, not based on position or salary. All members of staff contribute to the company thriving, so we believe it's vital and only fair to recognise everyone's contributions equitably.

Keeping up with the economy

We also want to make sure staff are remunerated and never lose out due to the country's economy.

Typically, we have given an annual pay-rise to all staff in line with inflation. In 2022, as inflation was unusually high and the prices of gas, electricity were going through the roof, we felt an inflation pay rise alone would be unfair as the people on higher wages would benefit far more than people on lower salaries. The rise in cost of living hits each household pretty much equally. So instead, we gave everyone a pay rise in line with previous years, but then a fixed cost of living payment – equal across all staff – to cover the increase in bills. We think that this was the fairest arrangement, and we believe it genuinely made a real difference in unstable financial times.

Community

Our community is important to us. There are many people around the world who struggle due to language and communication, and children that could excel in their learning far better when supported by symbols, breaking down some of the barriers to text. Our software and symbols are designed to help these people, and it's important that we take all opportunities to go above and beyond when helping our community.

This may be spending time developing specific symbols for no cost for an individual in need. Or it may involve creating freely distributed symbol resources for whole communities when a crisis arises.

A global community

When the global pandemic happened, we quickly developed symbols and materials to support learning from home, improving communication and understanding of Covid through difficult times for families and children – all of which were freely distributed. We developed a communication chart to support medical staff and patients with the Speech and Language Therapy Team at Weston General Hospital. We offered this for translation, expecting just our European resellers to help, but instead we were contacted by volunteers across the globe wanting to help. So, in partnership we made these critical care resources in well over 60 languages.

Again, when the war in Ukraine started and thousands of people were fleeing their homes to new countries, we worked in partnership with our community to create a set of communication materials for refugees. These were again translated by volunteers, helping to bridge the language barrier between Ukrainian refugees and their hosts.

The Widgit family

Community starts at home. We try our best to foster a supportive, fun and friendly unity between all staff. I'd like to think people see themselves as working *in* Widgit, not *for* Widgit, and that they are really part of the whole team; it's not just a job. For the most part, everyone is supportive and considerate of their colleagues. Everyone tries to be welcoming of new staff. We are trying to do more things to bring people together, such as socials and quizzes, which is especially important as more people are working flexibly from home.

We encourage self-expression and cultural diversity. People embody their individuality, for example through their clothes, hair, tattoos, office decorations; however they want, so long as they are being respectful to their colleagues. We are trying to do more with our recruitment to welcome a diverse workforce. If you fit our values, then anyone is welcome.

Environment and working practices

Work is such a big part of everyone's lives, and we really care about people's work-life balance. With the change the pandemic brought to working practices, we now support flexible working, with many people working from home much of the time, then coming together in the office when collaboration and team working is valuable. We support a mix of working patterns to meet everyone's individual wants and needs as best we can, whilst still encouraging togetherness. Wherever people work, we want to make sure they are safe and comfortable.

At your home

We strive to provide equipment or services that people need to work well at home, for example: comfortable chairs, decent laptops, tools for communication and co-working with colleagues, and 'home' workplace assessments.

At the company home

We recently moved into new offices, putting a huge effort into its design to ensure it's a colourful and inviting place to work – with team rooms and pods for individual working. We've tried to give the building real personality to reflect the fun Widgit character – with plants, symbol signs and wallpaper, and a splash of colour wherever you turn.

We also try to cater to staff needs, such as providing vegan milk and hot chocolate, bottled water, and pod coffee. Sound dampening installations have also been implemented for phone rooms. Any reasonable request will be listened to.

Striving for improvements

We do not have everything right by any means, but we are on a journey to improvement and development of the company.

Staff development

All staff at Widgit are hardworking and we encourage a proactive attitude. We have a committee of staff who are tasked with improving the community at Widgit, bringing people together, and listening to their suggestions to make the environment and company better.

All staff have access to LinkedIn Learning to aid their own professional development. We also have budget set aside for staff training and development.

Developing our employee responsibilities

We are working to develop our Employee Value Proposition, as we strive to get better at company communication, consistency, empowerment, management, and to also develop our benefits package.

Company improvements

We're working hard on improving the company, from ensuring our current policies align with our values, to putting a proper board and governance structure in place. We also want to ensure everyone has accurate job descriptions, and that we think carefully about the culture and organisation design as we grow.

Caring and appreciation

I believe everyone at Widgit genuinely cares for each other, our customers and our community – and our customers and community care about Widgit! It's therefore important that we always show our gratitude and do our best to be supportive.

An example of Widgit appreciating staff

During lockdown, after the first rush/panic/excitement of change it seemed everyone was in a bit of a lull, and the enforced home working was getting people down. Everyone had managed to ride out the twists and turns of the roller-coaster of the situation with hard work, but fatigue had started to set in. So, what could we do to help?

We sent everyone a voucher for a free Duvet Day. *“To be taken when you feel like you need a break from the daily routine. This is entirely on Widgit: it doesn't count against your holiday allowance, and you don't have to put it through Breathe (our holiday calendar). Treat it like a free (and guilt-free) sick day, for when your brain is feeling a little under the weather.”*



Free Duvet Day

This entitles Ben to one free duvet day to be taken when you just need to take a break from everything

Terms and conditions apply*

I HAVE DONE NOTHING AT ALL TODAY. AND IT FEELS AWESOME.

Ts & Cs:

- Valid until December 18th, 2020
- Does not affect your leave allowance
- Short notice acceptable (with consideration for team-mates)
- Not to be used adjacent to bank holidays or the Christmas break

Important Rules of Use

- Your Duvet Day should involve a significant time spent in contact with a duvet
- It should involve time spent on yourself, and not “getting things done”
- It should not be used to extend some other holiday which isn't focused on lazing about under (or over) a duvet
- This voucher can be extended to include Duvet Days for one or more pets (that you own)
- You may refer to this as a Continental Quilt Day if you are angrily alliteration averse
- These important rules are completely non-binding as long as you use the day in some way that makes you happy

This was posted to all staff from me in a handwritten envelope to make it feel more special (when do we ever receive handwritten letters these days)?

A colleague told me that when she showed this to her sister, she said: “You must work for the best company ever!” It seemed to genuinely touch people and show that we understood just how hard it's been.

So much so, that we've since shared more Duvet Day vouchers across our growing team to demonstrate how much we value our staff and their mental wellbeing!

An example of a customer appreciating Widgit

We recently had a parent who contacted tech support about a very old piece of software (more than 20 years old) that didn't work on their new machine. They wanted to buy the latest version, but this had also been discontinued. They said: "Although the program is not age-appropriate, she still enjoys it as it gives us time together where she is achieving." Our support team went above and beyond to get them a version that would work on their machine; even though the product had been discontinued, we provided them with the new version for no charge. The parent asked if they could pay, but we told him there was no need and we were just very happy to help him and his daughter.

At the office a few days later, a huge Waitrose hamper full of amazing delights for the whole company turned up, along with the following note:

"Thank you for all your help, there's not many like you. I would like to thank you for all your help and generosity in giving Sara the First Keys 3. I looked up Widgit and it said your company believe in integrity, kindness and quality. Well, your company proved that. I believe it's what you do, not what you say, that proves who you really are. Please pass my thanks on to all concerned at Widgit."

Caring for our humans

A kind employer recognises the human behind the job.

People's lives can be difficult for all sorts of reasons, and no one can be expected to just turn that off at the office door.

Health is so important, and as I know very well from my own struggles, it can really impact everything you do. As well as the standard suitable equipment to make working safe and comfortable – desks, chairs, monitor rises, a comfortable mouse, a keyboard – our staff also have private medical care. We have one of the highest tiers that cover existing conditions, which have on-call GPs at any time, and self-referral to many services like physio, with excellent mental health support and counselling. We encourage everyone to use this as much as they can. I'd like our company to grow enough so that we could afford to offer this benefit to people's partners.

We are also considerate, caring and willing to help with personal circumstances when anything difficult arises. We recognise that every staff member is a real human with emotions and personal responsibilities that cannot be limited or affected by the company. We will give leave to staff to be able to support their partners or family in need. We offer flexible working and time off for carers. We try to make sure our policies are broad enough to support our way of thinking; for example, we understand bereavement is not just about family: it's also friends and even beloved family pets.

So, what does this mean for you?

Everyone who works in Widgeo should have a positive and caring attitude and behave in a kind way. It's not always easy, but we try our best to be:

- honest and open
- humble, but proud of our work and achievements
- positive – positivity breeds positivity in self and others
- polite and thankful
- approachable and willing to listen

We all endeavour to:

- do what we say we are going to do
- go the extra mile
- do the best by people
- listen and trust what people say
- not think the worst and jump to conclusions, but consider the possible issues
- remember that everyone's a human being and they all have their own stuff going on
- be mindful of how other people will feel about what you do and say
- appreciate people's differences
- take time, be attentive and remember your own and other's needs
- respect people's differences and encourage Widgeo where possible
- smile and be friendly

And most of all, Widgeo should be considered in all our decision making. It should never just be about money or gain. It's important to always try to do the right thing, even if it means more work, time or inconvenience.

- Where is the good in this decision?
- How will this decision impact others? Be that colleagues, partners, customers, or other companies?

By asking ourselves these questions, we are being '**actively kind**', which is what Widgeo is all about.