

Good morning folks. Today's assembly is brought to you by the IDLES song Danny Nedelko, the Statue of Liberty, Fundamental British Values and culture building.

In this context culture means "how we do things around here". There is a famous quote: culture eats strategy for breakfast. Meaning the success of any organisation, or part of society, is reliant on first getting the culture right. Leaders should focus on culture, how we do things around here, first. No matter the brilliance of a leader's strategy, if she fails to get the culture right, success will always be a struggle.

During last summer's Olympic Games in Paris I was struck by the strength of French culture, which is based on the motto of "liberté, égalité, fraternité,". Freedom, equality and brotherhood. Developed in the 17th century, and popularised during the French Revolution, French leaders and philosophers have ensured the concepts of liberté, égalité, fraternité have been woven into French society, eventually being enshrined in the constitution in 1958. The motto was used beautifully during the Olympic Games to emphasis the brotherhood amongst nations and athletes from around the world.

Building a positive culture relies on leaders designing, then over communicating, emphasising that culture at every opportunity, encouraging all stakeholders to embrace it. Done well, a culture creates positive social norms for the betterment of all. Over the last twenty years or so the British government has developed the concept of fundamental British values with a view to shifting and improving British culture, and to combat prejudice and extremism in all their forms. Fundamental British Values clearly echo, amongst other things, the French motto. "Fundamental British values" encompass four key principles: democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance. These values are the cornerstone of our society, ensuring that we live in a fair and just world.

As we explore the concept of fundamental British values, it's important to recognize their role in shaping not only our society but also how we engage with one another as individuals and as a community. These values are more than just abstract ideas; they are the principles that guide our everyday lives and interactions.

I'd also like to reflect on the potential power of sub-cultures and the positive impact they can have on society as a whole. Which is where IDLES come in. IDLES are a contemporary British punk band whose music and lyrics are both a commentary on modern Britain, and a passionate call for society to be more inclusive, kinder, tolerant and loving. One of their most popular songs is called Danny Nedelko. It is about a friend of the band, Danny, who is a Polish immigrant. The song is passionately pro-immigration and pro-tolerance, resonating with the British values of tolerance and liberty. An excerpt:

"My blood brother is an immigrant

A beautiful immigrant

My blood brother's Freddie Mercury

A Nigerian mother of three

My blood brother's Malala

A Polish butcher, he's Mo Farah

He's made of bones, he's made of blood, he's made of flesh he's made of love, he's made of you, he's made of me, UNITY"

Joe Talbot yells these words, emphasising the beauty of diversity, the immeasurably positive impact immigration has had on Britain, and that underneath we are all people, we are all one. There is eloquence in screaming.

Let's explore each value.

## Democracy

Democracy is the foundation upon which our society is built. It gives every citizen the right to have a say in how they are governed, promoting equality and fairness. Through democratic processes like voting, we influence decisions that affect our lives. It's essential to engage with this process to ensure our voices are heard and represented. Just as the song "Danny Nedelko" by IDLES celebrates the strength found in community and collective voices, our democratic engagement is a powerful reminder of unity and the importance of diverse perspectives.

In a democratic society, the emphasis on participation is paramount. Citizens are encouraged to vote in elections, attend community meetings, and engage in discussions about policies that impact their

lives. This active participation fosters a sense of ownership over the decisions made in governance.

### **The Rule of Law**

The rule of law is crucial in maintaining order and justice. It means that laws apply equally to everyone, ensuring fairness and protection for all citizens. This principle helps build trust in legal systems and institutions, providing a framework for resolving disputes and protecting rights. In a society that values these laws, we can find a sense of security.

The rule of law should also serve as a safeguard against tyranny and abuse of power. If laws are upheld and enforced without bias, citizens can feel confident that their rights will be protected, and justice will be served. This is why it is essential for the legal system to operate independently from political influence. An independent judiciary is a hallmark of a fair society, as it should ensure laws are interpreted and applied fairly, regardless of the status or power of those involved.

### **Individual Liberty**

Individual liberty refers to the freedom to make our own choices, express our beliefs, and pursue our interests. This value encourages

personal responsibility and autonomy, allowing us to lead lives that reflect our personal values and aspirations. However, with liberty comes the responsibility to respect others' freedoms and rights. The lyrics of "Danny Nedelko" emphasize the idea of freedom and the joy that comes from embracing one another as individuals who contribute to the greater whole.

Individual liberty is not without its complexities. While we cherish our right to express ourselves freely, this freedom must be balanced with the rights of others. For example, while one may wish to express controversial opinions, it is vital to consider how such expressions may impact others.

### **Mutual Respect and Tolerance**

Mutual respect and tolerance are essential for a harmonious society. They teach us to appreciate diversity and to embrace differences in culture, religion, and lifestyle. By fostering an environment of understanding and acceptance, we create a more inclusive and cohesive community. This value reminds us to look beyond our differences and find common ground with others, much like the

message of unity in "Danny Nedelko," where the celebration of multiculturalism reflects the strength of our shared humanity. The concepts of "fraternité" or brotherhood resonate deeply here, highlighting our togetherness and the importance of supporting one another.

### **The Importance of These Values**

Fundamental British values are not just ideals; they are practical tools that help us navigate the complexities of modern life. They promote social cohesion and ensure that our society functions smoothly. By upholding these values, we create a welcoming environment where everyone can thrive, much like the pursuit of "égalité" in the French motto, where all individuals are afforded equal opportunities.

In a world increasingly defined by globalization and interconnectedness, the importance of these values cannot be overstated. Societies face challenges such as migration, cultural clashes, and social inequalities. Fundamental British values provide a framework for addressing these challenges by promoting dialogue, understanding, and collaboration.

While the importance of British values cannot be overstated, there are questions we as citizens should ask ourselves. How successful has the introduction of Fundamental British Values been? Does modern Britain reflect these values? Have recent governments lived up to these values? If British values have been a success, why are IDLES so angry? What can we as individuals do to better society?

A thought on the third question and the power of leadership. Cultures do shift. Cultures can be shifted, no matter how deeply embedded. The Statue of Liberty was gifted to America by France. It is a monument to freedom, to the abolition of slavery and to immigration. There is a message inscribed on the Statue, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,". This was the culture the United States of America was proudly built on. And yet a president has just been elected at least partly on the promise of using wartime powers and military forces to carry out "the largest deportation programme in American history". A positive culture must be embraced and nurtured by citizens and leaders alike or it will be lost.

You will soon be able to vote. To have your say in how our country is run. And as you take on this responsibility I urge you to consider how you can make our country a better place, and to make sure you have your say by voting.

I commend the song Danny Nedelko to you. And I say let us embrace and foster our Fundamental British Values, and leave our society a better place for future generations.

Thank you for listening.