

MISSION STATEMENTS



“The very essence of leadership is that you have to have vision. You can’t blow an uncertain trumpet.”

– Theodore Hesburgh, President, University of Notre Dame

WHY A MISSION STATEMENT?

A compelling mission statement has a real impact on an organization and its members. It can provide a clear sense of direction for peoples’ efforts and it can be a source of pride and motivation for everyone in the organization. Kouzes and Posner, in their book *The Leadership Challenge* found that where visions are clear, employee satisfaction and esprit de corps were higher in the organization.

WHEN VISIONS ARE CLEAR

- Job satisfaction is higher
- Greater commitment & loyalty
- Esprit de Corps
- Higher clarity about organizational values
- Increased pride in the organization

A clear mission statement serves several functions. First, it provides a context for decision making. It helps

everyone know which activities it should take on and which it should not. At Pizza Hut for example, where the mission is “to provide a quick and satisfying meal”, this automatically precludes certain menu items, like lasagna.

Second, a clear mission provides a yardstick for performance. It becomes clear to members when they have accomplished what is important to the organization. With the words “the eagle has landed” in 1969 the Apollo

space team realized their stated mission to put a manned space craft on the moon by the end of the decade.

Third, a clear mission provides a focus for collaboration and shared responsibility in an organization. Steve Jobs and Mike Wozniak first began their collaboration when Nolan Bushnell approached them to develop a new version of the pong game for Atari. He gave them a deadline and offered them a bonus if the game met certain requirements. This began a collaboration that gave rise to Apple Computer.

THE FUNCTIONS OF PURPOSE

- Providing a context for decisions
- Being a yardstick for performance
- Creating a focus for collaboration
- Motivating excellence

Fourth, a compelling purpose can become a motivator of excellence. Janet Fiola, speaking to a group of visitors to the award winning Fetal Heart Monitor manufacturing facility at Medtronic in St. Paul, Minnesota, in response to a question about their quality program, responded, "Quality program? We don't have and we don't need a quality program. We're saving babies' lives here. Do you think we need a quality program?"

PITFALLS

Just having a mission statement of course is not enough. It must be clear enough and compelling enough that it captures peoples' attention and interest enough to be remembered. Then it must be followed through and applied at every level of the organization. The organization must live the mission.

Many mission statements become quickly forgotten by the members of

the organization. Dan Rider, of the Knight Rider News Service, warned corporate organizations to avoid the kind of vanilla, one-size-fits-all mission statement that has little or no meaning for employees. He said that about 90% of mission statements end up sounding about the same:

"Our company will ethically provide a complete line of products and services to meet the dynamically changing needs of our corporate, group, and individual customers by innovatively developing new approaches using new technologies while simultaneously enhancing our employees' lives and providing superior returns to our shareholders."

ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE MISSION STATEMENT

Peter Block in his book, "The Empowered Manager," gives four pieces of advice to those sitting down to put together a mission statement. First, he said, forget about being number one. Many organizations mistake market share or rankings and recognition for mission. A mission statement reflects what your purpose is more so than how well you are going to do at it or

GETTING STARTED

- Forget about being number one
- Don't be practical
- Start with your customers
- How will we treat each other?

how large you are going to be. Second, don't be practical; make it radical and compelling. By definition, a mission statement describes what you hope to accomplish in the future, through the collective efforts of the organization. It is more about possibilities than current realities. A good example of a compelling mission statement was put together by Microsoft in the early 90's. Bill Gates said "Our vision is very simple; It is a computer in every home and on every desk running Microsoft software." BYU likewise has a very compelling mission: "To assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life." A mission statement, if it is compelling rather than simply practical, can inspire and lift the efforts of the organization's members.

Third, start with your customers. A mission statement centers around





the key services you provide to your organization's customers. What is the value or benefit you want to achieve in the lives of your customers? A good example is the West Point mission whose "customers" include not only the cadets but the nation they serve. "We build men and women of character who provide the nation's defense." The Marriott School of Management provides another good example:

"Our mission is to attract and develop men and women of faith, character, and professional ability who will become outstanding managers and leaders throughout the world."

Lastly, mission statements can also address the question How will we treat each other? In other words, a mission statement can also address the experience our employees have while at work and what kind of organization we want to have. While a mission statement usually points outside of the organization, a part of it may point inward at the climate and culture of the organization itself. A good example is

the mission statement developed at Levi Strauss a few years ago:

"We want a company that our people are proud of and committed to, where all employees have the opportunity to contribute, learn, grow, and advance based on merit, not politics or background."

We want our people to feel respected, treated fairly, listened to, and involved. Above all we want satisfaction from accomplishments and friendships, balanced personal and professional lives, and to have fun in our endeavors."

DEVELOPING A MISSION STATEMENT

Putting a mission statement together involves getting your team together to discuss and come to consensus around several key questions. First, who are your key stakeholders and what are their expectations for your products or services? As the team comes to consensus around this question the elements of a mission become apparent.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Who are our stakeholders?
- What do we provide them and what expectations do they have?
- What is the essential mission that we serve?
- What values are most important in our operation?
- What key metrics can we use to measure our effectiveness?

Next, what values are most important in our operation? Often articulating values give a context for how an organization will go about accomplishing its mission. These values often become inseparable from the mission statement itself. The BYU Center for Service & Learning, for example, whose mission is "to provide every student with a meaningful service opportunity" has adopted as part of their mission statement the following values:

OUR CREDO

Safety	The safety of every student is paramount.
Respect	We will show respect in every way for the dignity of the individual or agency served.
Reflection	Reflecting should be an integral part of each service experience.
Selflessness	Our motivation is to give, without expectation of reward.
Meaning	Our service opportunities will meet real and meaningful community needs.

Lastly, the question of how you will measure your success in achieving the mission becomes important. Along with stating a mission it is useful to articulate the metrics you will use in assessing how your organization is progressing toward its mission. The Center for Service & Learning again provides a good example:

OUR SCORECARD

- We will measure our success by:
- The quality of the service experience as measured through satisfaction and effectiveness surveys
 - The number of students involved in service experiences each year
 - The number of agencies we assist
 - The amount of reflection as measured by the amount of time spend in discussion or reflective learning after each service opportunity
 - Percent of graduates involved in meaningful community service

“Leadership is lifting a person’s vision to higher sights, the raising of a person’s performance to a higher standard, the building of a personality beyond it’s normal expectations.”

- Peter Drucker

TO DO LIST

- ✓ Get your team together and start a dialogue around the mission of your organization. Get everyone’s inputs and take your time refining this into a mission statement.
- ✓ Be careful of the vanilla, one-size-fits-all mission statement. Make sure that the mission uniquely describes your organization’s contribution and is something that people will remember and find compelling.
- ✓ Incorporate values and metrics into your statement, defining how you will operate as an organization and how you will define success.

THE BOTTOM LINE

A mission statement can help unify and inspire the efforts of your organization when it is well stated, frequently used and referred to and measured as a standard for your organization’s effectiveness over time.

“If your vision is something you would be embarrassed to tell your mother about, then you’re on the right track.”

- Peter Block

