

Mission and Vision—Align Behind A Winning Message!

Motivate staff by reviewing why your company exists and what it does best—then focus & execute!



When the senior leadership gets together to create the company's mission and vision, ask them to consider the following: What is the purpose of your organization? What would be lost if the company ceased to exist?

By Bruce Hodes

The mission and vision of a company is critical to the overall success of an organization. But they're often forgotten. The senior leadership team creates the corporate mission and vision, and captures them on posters that are strategically tacked up around the building.

Meanwhile, how does a corporate citizen react to this phenomenon? Too often, they see it as "Horse manure!" In many companies, whatever is in the mission or values statement isn't seen as relevant to the organization's day-to-day operations. In other words, the organization's behavior doesn't square with its declaration of ideals.

However, at their best, a mission (or "reason for being") and vision give an organization a future to live into. This potential future galvanizes and focuses the company. Whether or not goals are met entirely, movement toward them develops teamwork and is valuable to the company. So what exactly is a mission and vision statement and how do organizations get to this point?

Some of the following thinking and exercises were inspired by an article called "Building Your Company's Vision," by James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras, the authors of *Built to Last*. In the article, the authors describe how to write a reason for being.

One of the issues with this topic is that each bloodsucking consultant, like yours truly—God bless our souls because the world would be a boring place without us—has a different idea of what a mission statement should be. The same goes for values and "big hairy audacious goals" (BHAGs—a term used in the book cited above), etc. The lack of an agreed-upon definition creates confusion. Corporate citizens argue about what a

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mission is, what a vision is and what the differences are. Yikes! Save me or stab me with a stick.

So, in the face of all that, let me give you the right definitions. KIDDING! There is no "right" way to do this kind of foundational writing—notwithstanding the exorbitant fee that the consultant charges while claiming to have the right way. There are only two necessary ingredients to this exercise: 1) that the

work is relevant to the participants and 2) that the participants are prepared to demonstrate, through committed action, their adherence to what they create—no kidding. Relevance and action are important. To my way of thinking, they are the only things that are important.

DEVELOP THEMES

A mission statement defines the intended future role of the business in terms of corporate commitment, strategic focus, market needs to be served and products/services to be provided. It should be feasible, desirable and flexible.

A traditional mission statement typically encompasses a company's commitment. It answers questions such as what is our market discipline (i.e. customer intimacy, product innovation or operational excellence)? What customer and market needs do we serve? What products and services do we provide? What are we competent at? What do we want our customers to know us for? What do we want our employees to know us for?

The company vision is a statement of where the organization wants to be in three years. It encompasses the strategic focus, core business strategies for each, opportune initiatives outside of core business, strategic competencies, internal development (enhancement of strategic competencies, corporate capabilities, organizational strategies, financial ownership) and growth size.

When thinking about your company's mission and vision, think about purpose. When the senior leadership gets together to create the company's mission and vision, ask them to consider the following: What is the purpose of your organization? What would be lost if the company ceased to exist? What kind of organization would you work for regardless of whether you got a salary or not, etc.?

Once these questions are answered, post participants' work on the walls. At this point, everyone reads what the others have written. We flit around the room as a group, stopping at each posting, while the author presents his or her work. Everyone asks questions and gives feedback. At this point, themes should start emerging.

COMPLETE THE PICTURE

The last part of the exercise is to divide the group in two. This will make it easier to organize and focus. Each group

synthesizes the work and drafts a reason for being that would touch, move and inspire them and other employees.

Now I get involved. (It's a good thing I have something to do, given the bucks I'm charging.) I work with the two groups' versions of the reason for being and draw out the common "through-lines." I listen for what binds the company together and gives it power and focus. After I whittle the two versions to the extent that I can, I ask for a group of volunteers who will meet after the session to wordsmith the final version of the company's reason for being. They select a leader and choose a date to present their work to the entire group for comments and feedback.

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The point is not that the reason for being is crafted to everyone's satisfaction. Rather, the reason for being must include all the relevant points so the group aligns behind it and engages the rest of the organization in embracing and demonstrating its message.

I leave you with some words of wisdom from former Los Angeles Lakers and Chicago Bulls coach Phillip Jackson. When thinking about your company's purpose, remember this: "Vision without action is simply another form of blindness. An idea without implementation and execution is nothing more than a passing thought." The point is: Having a vision can drive and motivate people. However, if companies lose focus on what's authentic and relevant about the vision, the meaning can easily disappear. **TS**

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