

## **The Value Of Vision And Mission**

It's where you want to be and how you'll get there

By  
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The terms vision statement and mission statement, have been beaten to death by organizations. However, both of these items can help drive companies in ways that build loyalty, growth and consistency, if handled correctly.

Too often these credos are fed to employees without a full understanding of their impact on the individual. It is not uncommon to have a group of executives formulate the statements without the input of employees, leading to irrelevant, common and confusing paragraphs. These statements are usually filled with self-aggrandizing adjectives and bland objectives, which are then framed and hung on the wall for all prospects and clients to see as they enter the organization's office.

In order to avoid stereotypical vision and mission statements the organization should spend time to understand its goals, client base, growth and expansion plans, as well as why the organization was founded and what it plans to do for its employees, the community and itself in the short and long term.

When formulating the vision and mission statements executives should ask certain pertinent questions of themselves and the other employees:

What affect will these statements have on the people who work within the organization?

How often will they refer to them?

Are they relevant to the folks who look at them everyday?

Were they put in place for the benefit of clients, shareholders, employees or all three groups?

Whose input went into the formation of both statements?

Will they hold up over time?

Do they reflect the values and beliefs of the organization?

I recently spent three days with the employees of a company. All the executives were in attendance in addition to most of the other folks. The purpose of the conference was to enable everyone to contribute to the company's vision and mission statements.

We started by laying out ground rules:

Everyone's input was needed.

The entire process would be non-judgmental.

Attendees could say, in fact were encouraged to say, exactly what was on their mind without retribution.

The statements would be decided upon by the end of the conference and implemented. Open communications would continue after the conference.

We began the process by defining the vision statement as an understanding of how the participants saw the present and future of the company. The mission statement was defined as how they want to realize that vision, both now and in the future.

A list of the company's principles and values were discussed. These included why the company was started and what was behind its growth (both internally and externally). Each word or phrase was dissected for relevance to the company, the industry and the people in the room. Questions were asked such as: Were these the items that moved people to buy into the company's industry view? Were they the reasons why the individuals worked for the company? Did they symbolize discomforting ideas for the folks in attendance?

Everything was looked at from the perspective of the employee first. Why did they work for the company? And why did they want to continue to work for it?

Those two questions are usually the forgotten elements in most vision and mission statements.

The common conception is that vision and mission statements are made for clients and prospects. They are, in fact, secondary to the employee's buy-in. Vision and mission statements are first and foremost, the fuel that drives the company from the inside out. If you have all the bells and whistles for customers and prospects but it has no relevance for employees, you may as well hang it facing the wall.

We spent time assessing the beliefs and values of each attendee and how they fit into his or her view of the company. We then analyzed the past strengths and weaknesses of the company. After extensive discussion we moved onto evaluating the organization's current strengths and weaknesses including the most important aspects of the company as seen by the participants.

Following the insights involving current strengths and weaknesses we began defining where the attendees wanted to see the organization go from its current position. By breaking into smaller groups they were able to begin forming their own vision and mission statements by listing each group's principles and values as vital components of the greater vision and mission of the company.

Each group's principles and values were then reviewed and prioritized. Common elements were identified and defined.

From all the information collected the company's vision and mission statements were carefully crafted. Everyone's suggestions were taken into consideration. The final outcome made for a successful meeting.

However, the next step is as important as the crafting of the statements themselves. Companies must be aware of the “drop the ball” syndrome.

Time and time again, organizations follow effective conferences with...nothing! People go back to old ways and habits. The effects of the new vision and mission statements wither away like the motivational seminar that has no follow-up. Attendees stayed pumped-up for three days and then begin the deflation process.

It is imperative to keep the lines of communications open. There must be a process to check-in with attendees to make sure they understand that their suggestions, thoughts and views are valued.

In the case of our conference, everyone received his or her copy of the organization’s vision and mission statement within a short period of time. They were thanked for their input and reminded that they integral in writing both statements. In addition, a program of inter-company communication was installed to make sure that the vital interaction that created both documents continued.

The final outcome, were not only statements which were relevant to clients, prospects and employees alike but also a group of people who felt an ownership in the future of the vision and mission of their company.

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