



Mission and Vision Essentials

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

Most organizations have done some strategic planning work that includes generating a mission statement and vision statement. I am amazed how much confusion there is relative to these two simple concepts and how the quality of statements is all over the map. This article will untangle the mess and give examples to show the difference in quality.

There are huge differences between a mission statement and a vision statement, although some organizations try to combine them into one statement. Actually, I have seen several organizations that have a mission statement that is really a vision and a vision statement that is their mission. It does not kill the organization, but it can get really confusing, and since the role of these statements is to clarify rather than confuse, why not get it right?

The mission statement is always about current reality. It is what we are trying to accomplish every day at work. It tells people what is important now, and it is crystal clear about that. Let me share a good mission statement and a terrible mission statement.

Great Mission statement - for the Wegmans Grocery Chain - "Every day you get our best."

Terrible Mission statement - "To establish beneficial business relationships with diverse suppliers who share our commitment to customer service, quality, and competitive pricing."

The reason the first one is good is because it is short, memorable, and it actually tells people what is important to do today at work. If you work at Wegmans, you know exactly how to treat customers every day.

The second mission statement is not good, because it is a bunch of management-speak and does not even give a whiff of what people are supposed to do at work. In fact, that statement could apply to a hospital, a garbage collection firm, a lawyer's office, a manufacturing plant, the US military service, a real estate firm, or a baseball team, to name just a few. In reality, that mission statement is for Denny's - - What? Where is the food? Isn't Denny's about getting wholesome food to people at good prices? Fill the tummy with really good stuff, and don't soak the customer, folks! Don't talk about establishing beneficial business relationships with diverse suppliers... etc. That is not your mission!

The vision statement is entirely different. The vision is all about where the organization is trying to go in the future. Without a good vision, the organization is like a ship without a rudder. You can go out on the ocean and sail around, but your chances of getting anywhere interesting or profitable are nil. You have no ability to control your destiny. You don't even know where you are going.

Really good vision - Gorbel Inc. (maker of Cranes) - "We defy gravity"

Really bad vision statement - "Diversity means valuing differences. It's a corporate value that must be continually developed, embraced, and incorporated into the way we do business."

The first one makes a great vision statement for many reasons. First, it is short and punchy: easy to remember. Second, it really has a double meaning. One refers to the product made by Gorbel, but the second is that they intend to keep "going up," even when the market goes down - "We defy gravity." Now, we all know that to defy gravity literally without assistance is impossible, but that does not prevent the statement from being a powerful and brilliant vision for Gorbel Inc..

The second one is terrible because it, again, does not give a clue about the business and only refers to one thing - diversity. Well, there is nothing wrong with diversity as a value, but if that is the only thing mentioned in the vision, the organization has nowhere to go but down. In fact, they did go down. That was the vision for Blockbuster. Bye Bye now!

It does not take any extra time or energy to get these concepts right. Make sure when you do your strategic plan that you do not mix up the concepts of

Vision and Mission, and do think about having high quality statements rather than drivel, so they really work for your organization.

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