

Successful Supervisor Part 98

Know Your Purpose

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

It is essential for you to have a purpose for your work other than to put food on the table. We tend to lose sight of the meaning of life if we cannot articulate a clear purpose. Let me clarify the difference between an individual's purpose, values, mission and vision so you can appreciate the role that purpose plays for your life.

Purpose tells you *WHY* you are here

The formal definition of purpose is "something set up as an object to be obtained: intention." Purpose represents a personal commitment for the highest calling of your being. Without a firm understanding of your purpose, your work loses relevance. The reason you get up and go to work each day is to fulfil your purpose.

It is important to be very specific and concrete with your purpose statement. For my business, my purpose is "To grow leaders." I believe that is why God put me on this earth and gave me the capabilities that I have. Try to boil down your purpose statement into the fewest number of words, so you can communicate it to others succinctly. If possible, I like to think in terms on one article (usually "To") followed by one verb and one noun.

Values form the FOUNDATION for everything you do

Values allow us to test the rightness of an action or thought. These important concepts about what life is supposed to be like were programmed into us long before we were able to walk and talk. Usually values come from our parents, but they are also shaped over time by other influencers such as school, friends, church, experiences and other events that happen early in life.

For most of us, the set of values we obtained in our youth will remain with us the rest of our life. It is difficult to change a deep-seated value, and most people would not want to do so. Our values form the lens through which we view everything around us. Values are also highly culturally specific. For example, to bribe another person is not acceptable in some cultures and perfectly fine in others.

It is important to have your values clearly visible to you. Write them down and refer to them often. For best results, repeat daily.

Mission tells you WHAT you are doing now

Mission is important because you need to know exactly what you are trying to do now. It is similar to purpose, but more specific. Think about walking into your place of work and picturing exactly what you are trying to accomplish today. That is your mission. I believe that mission statements should be short and memorable. Let me share what I consider a good mission statement and then share one that is not so good.

Wegmans is a grocery chain that is based in Rochester, N.Y., where I live. Their mission is “Every day you get our best.” That makes a great mission because it tells all of the employees exactly what they are trying to accomplish on a daily basis.

Here is a mission statement that doesn’t work for me. “To establish beneficial business relationships with diverse suppliers who share our commitment to customer service, quality and competitive pricing.” The statement is so general that it gives the reader no idea what industry is involved. Actually, that is the mission statement for Denny’s. What? Where is the food?

Vision tells you WHERE you are going

The vision statement is strictly about where you are going in the future. It describes as accurately the end state or objective you are working toward. A good vision pulls you in the direction you wish to go. Without a good vision there is little impetus to improve on the status quo.

Some people believe that a vision that has the possibility of not happening sometime in the future is a poor one. I disagree. Consider the early Federal Express Vision: “Absolutely positively overnight.” It is easy to see that there were some times when acts of God would prevent the company from doing this, but that did not make it a bad vision. They made a lasting organization around that compelling image.

Make sure you have these four concepts well documented for your life and your organization too. You will go much farther than you would go otherwise.

This is a part in a series of articles on “Successful Supervision.” The entire series can be viewed on www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision or on this blog.

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