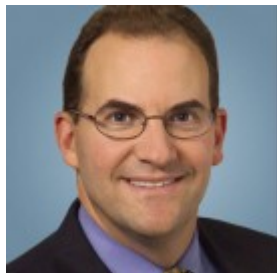


Forbes



Lawrence Siff, Contributor

“Siff-ting” through the Family Business: I untangle the problems.

ENTREPRENEURS

5 Lessons For Mastering Your Mission

Do you know your company’s mission statement? Do your employees? Is your mission statement an accurate reflection of the company as it exists today? Do you even have a mission statement?

I am constantly surprised by the number of companies I work with that have mission statements that are impersonal and generic to the point of being meaningless. Statements like ‘We aspire to be the industry leader,’ or ‘Our goal is to be our customers’ preferred supplier’ or ‘We want to achieve superior financial results’ could apply to almost any company in any industry. They serve no real purpose, internally or externally.

A clearly articulated mission statement tells your employees what your company’s goal is and how everyone should work to achieve it. It defines why you are in business and what principles guide you. A good mission statement is credible, specific, and something you can execute on. It telegraphs what you and your company stand for and care about and serves as a rallying point for employees.

A mission statement is a moral compass that helps employees make the right decisions and feel connected to a larger purpose. People who know *what* to do and *why* to do it deliver better performance; companies with purposeful employees achieve better results. I have seen it over and over again with our clients.



So take a look at your company’s mission statement — if you have one. If you need to develop or modify it, here are five rules for creating an effective mission statement:

1. Make it distinctive and meaningful

Why are you in business? Yes, it is to make money. But there is something beyond that, which is specific to what your company is about. Let’s say you are in the real estate business. You don’t just buy and sell houses or relocate 100,000 people per year. You help people *find their homes*. If you’re a food company, you don’t just feed people. You *nourish* them.

Microsoft MSFT +1.33%’s mission statement — ‘Our mission and values are to help people and businesses throughout the world realize their full potential.’

2. It should be simple; not simplistic

When I work with a company to help develop its mission statement, I have management start

NACA’s (the predecessor of NASA) mission statement. (Photo credit: Wikipedia)

with the reason (why) the company exists. We focus on the future, in terms of where we want your company to be (vision). We combine the vision and beliefs to create the mission statement that is distilled down into several key points that are really critical to your company's success. Your mission statement should be simple, but not simplistic. Fast-food chain Wendy's wraps its mission statement around 'What We Believe;' five statements ranging from how customers should be treated to the importance of teamwork to giving back to the community.

3. Make an emotional connection

Mission statements are like brands — the most successful ones tap your emotions. You want people to feel something when they read or hear your mission statement. You want them to be inspired and be proud to work for you. A strong mission statement can make you attractive to potential employees and to customers. Starbucks' mission statement, 'Our mission: to inspire and nurture the human spirit — one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time,' has far stronger appeal than 'We want to be your No. 1 choice for coffee, anywhere in the world.' That second statement pretty much describes *what Starbucks SBUX +1.58%* is doing, but not why.

4. Communicate it consistently

Make sure employees *know* what your mission statement is. Yes, it is important that they embody it, but the mission statement needs to be prominently displayed both offline and online, not just at your company headquarters' lobby. It should be easy to find on your website, social media, and in all company collateral. The mission statement should be part of every employee's objectives and review — just as it should be reflected in their everyday activities. Ask them, 'What are you doing to communicate both inside and outside the company the key messages that reinforce and enhance our overall values and mission?'

5. Act on it

It's not enough to communicate the mission statement — you have to live up to it. The mission statement should reflect your values and respect your culture within a supportive environment. You have to create a culture that is unique and representative of your principles. If you espouse to be a company that treats employees with respect and trust and then demand they bring in doctors' notes when they are out sick, there is a disconnect. A lack of authenticity will eventually become apparent not just on the inside but to the outside world as well.

Once you have developed your overarching message and incorporated it into your practices, you have the foundation for success. Your mission statement can — and should — be the prism through which you view your strategic business plan, your marketing, and your everyday initiatives. Ask yourself, 'Does this relate to the mission of the company?' 'Is it in accord with our values?' If the answer is no, then why are you doing it? The mission statement cannot just be a marketing tool; rather it has to be a promise and commitment to both your employees and the community at large. The simplicity, strength, and power of a strong, memorable and meaningful mission statement can be the driving force for your company.