

The Bouquet we give ourselves looks more like weeds to the other person

Mission Statement Madness

In our recent past a fad has swept the entire business community. The fad in this instance is the one called 'Mission Statements'. In the most recent of times there has been an extension to the concept. Mission Statements may now even be called 'Customer Charters' or even 'Corporate Vision'.

In the early days before Mission Statements and Vision Statements became a 'must have' business trend, they were originally the realm of a handful of very successful, highly focused and often smaller sized businesses. In fact they weren't even called 'Mission' statements back then. It was just something the company said that it did, and that ALL people who worked there, agreed with and strove to achieve.

Business being business, after a while word leaked out about these 'statements of belief'. Business being business, the short and quick fix seemed the answer to all of a company's current ills. It is probable that there was a change in awareness at the higher levels of business. After making many decisions based on short-sighted profit taking, SOME senior managers came to the understanding that their company was losing touch.

Many consultants were hired and 'the quest' for the 'ultimate answer' had begun. Word of the nimble, innovative and often highly successful smaller players began to infiltrate bigger companies. In undertaking the quest, what was discovered was that these smaller successful firms had a common theme, and taking it down to its lowest denominator (and the WRONG ONE), bigger business identified the denominator as being a passionate theme that could be summed up in a few paragraphs.

Those paragraphs became known as the 'Mission Statement'.

Because big business doesn't have time or perhaps the ability (or often the desire) to do things properly, Mission Statements began to pop up all over the world. AND MOST COMPANIES MISSED THE POINT. They confused what the words said the company did, with what the company actually did.

Believing that the Mission Statement would deliver the all important competitive edge, companies by the truckloads rushed to join the craze in the mid 90's, adding it to those other silver bullets such as TQM, JIT, CRM and so on.

Here are a couple of 'mission' statements for you to consider. I won't tell you now who they belong to - see if you can figure out what type of industry they come from.

- *"We will strive at being the major provider of our service through the use of team work, strategic planning and customer focus, whilst combining state of the art technology to deliver total satisfaction"*
- *"Our mission is to provide an effective means of customer service and communication by focusing on team goals, the needs of the marketplace and the long term objectives of the company."*

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- *"It is our belief and aim to provide service to the customer that provides the ultimate satisfaction and at all times meets the desires of our customers with integrity, accuracy and fairness in everything we do".*
- *"We guarantee that our customer service and delivery, product quality and support will exceed anything you will find elsewhere. This is our commitment and our promise to you our valued client"*

Do you recognise any of them? Maybe they belong to a company you work for or a company that you know of is a major player in your field? We'll tell you 'who' later on.

Okay so now that you are in the groove about Mission/Vision/Customer Charter Statements and what they read like, lets have a dose of reality thrown into the equation.

Mission Statements MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, are thrown at the public as if they could REPLACE genuine passion and performance.

Without any possible argument, the greater majority of Mission Statements are so far from the public perception and so far from what employees know to be the 'real' truth that even having one is laughable.

So why do I believe this?

Let me answer that by asking a few questions and giving you the answers.

- Q. In companies that see the Mission Statement as a cure all, who creates the mission statement in the first place?
- A. A couple of people in management
- Q. Whose responsibility does it become to 'live up to' the Mission Statement?
- A. The general Staff
- Q. Who do management usually design their mission statements for?
- A. The Customer
- Q. Who usually are the first to ignore the Mission Statement when it suits them?
- A. Management

'So what is wrong with that?' some of you may be asking.

The problem stems from the reason that a Mission Statement exists in the first place, and then the short cut method used by most companies when they design one. Remember that Mission Statements were first created by smaller, passionate and successful companies and WERE A TRUE REFLECTION OF THEIR ATTITUDE to how they did what they did. Today's use by most companies is suspect at best.

The following are the steps that some companies use. These types of companies don't live it. They see the Mission Statement or 'Customer Charter' as a marketing exercise, the latest in a long line of management fads, the silver bullet.

1. Management senses that the company is lacking a certain something.
2. With a bit of analysis over lunch and written on the back of a drink coaster, a few people in middle management, and at the behest of people in senior management, 'discover' that the missing 'something' is corporate focus.
3. Having heard about these things called Mission Statements, senior managers decide amongst themselves, what is important for the company.

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4. Ignoring people for whom the Mission Statement is intended to represent, the senior management team ask the marketing team to come up with a statement that will **excite, unite, and delight**. No instructions are given suggesting that marketing ask the workers, suppliers or customers what THEY perceive the company's Mission Statement should say or what their Vision could be.
5. The brief to marketing sets the tone for the development. Essential to the statement are the words 'Customer', 'Team', 'Focus' and 'Commitment'. (Their similes may be used or preferred).
6. At a certain point Senior management gather all of the workers into the boardroom and unveil an impressive bronze plaque. Etched on the plaque is the company's brand new Mission Statement. Speeches usually precede AND follow its unveiling. Middle management applaud, workers clap or smile feebly. Some roll their eyeballs.
7. Staff drift off shaking their heads at the complete waste of time and resources, wondering how to live up to the myths written on the plaque. Senior Managers go home and tell their families what a wonderful day they had.

Now all of this may be coming across a bit harsh and yes I am taking things to the extreme.

The idea of a 'Mission Statement' or 'Customer Charter' or Vision is sound and in principle a fantastic idea. Where it falls apart is when the 'Mission Statement' becomes a '*Management Statement*' developed by management with no input from the majority of the organisation or customers. It falls apart even further when the focus for the Mission Statement is a PR message to be inflicted upon the customer.

It then becomes nothing more than a clump of words strung together in an attempt to overcome the inadequacies of the company's dealings with the customer - in other words, a marketing ploy. Have you read any of the 'service guarantees' that come with your telephone bill or your electricity bill? How about the ones from your Insurance Company? Ever had to test them? How did it go? Did they live up to the expectations or did you discover that their written word was just that - a written word. No action, just words.

If you decide to have a 'Mission Statement' for your organisation, you MUST LIVE IT, whole and soul.

It MUST come from the people entrusted to deliver on its words - your people, and ideally should include input from your customers.

EVERY new person who joins your company MUST be educated and filled with the knowledge of HOW and WHY the mission statement came to be. They MUST understand and be taught the reasons why the WAY they perform their roles, should meet the expectations and guidelines established in the 'Mission Statement' or how their actions will assist the company to achieve its stated Vision. Only then will the employee have the ownership of the words used and work towards meeting the expectations they set.

Everything that is said and done MUST be able to be immediately related back to the few thoughts gathered together under the banner of your 'Mission Statement'. Every time you fail to do this you weaken its effectiveness and purpose. Do NOT go to the trouble of creating one if you are unwilling to commit to the long term infusion of the beliefs of the statement every day of your business life.

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Understand this - The Customer does not care about your 'Mission Statement' unless they see the reality of it in practise. The first time that you fail to live up to the statement, you will effectively scream to your customer "We TALK it, but we sure as hell DON'T WALK it!"

Now back to the four examples of Mission Statements that I listed at the start of the chapter. Did you manage to identify the company or even the industry? Did any of them sound familiar to ones you may have seen before? Allow me to let you in on a little secret. As far as I know, all four of the 'Mission Statements' belong to NO ONE because I made them up as I sat here typing! That's not to say they aren't similar to some that exist. Of more than seventy Mission/Vision/Customer Charter statements that I reviewed (and I won't embarrass the many large organisations I assessed) not one of them either reflected the way they actually treat the customer, NOR accurately represented the view held by many of their employees entrusted to meet the Mission Statement content. And I really could embarrass some of them with the feedback I received.

In all my time I have found JUST ONE large organisation that strives to meet the standards set by its 'Mission Statement'. I have met maybe twenty or so smaller firms that walk their talk. The challenge for the smaller organisations will come when they begin to grow and add staff. If you are a successful firm in the process of change then one of the books I suggest you have in your Personal Success Library (Chapter 18), is Managing Corporate Lifecycles by Dr. Ichak Adizes.

Because it is such a rare event, allow me to include the entire 'Mission Statement' of the ONE larger organisation that truly tries to live up to everything it says. Of course this doesn't mean perfection. The organisation still has room to make important improvements and at least it is headed in the right direction. It also means that more often than not, the business reaches the standards it has publicly set.

That place is a Private Hospital in the Victorian Suburb of Malvern called Cabrini. Unlike companies that take the 'short cut' approach when designing their 'Mission Statements', this one is wordy, extensive and has not been designed for the sole purpose of fitting nicely on a corporate brochure. The majority of the hospital staff are enthused with the belief of the 'Mission Statement'. Staff are constantly reminded about the ideals and many decisions are influenced by living up to the standard set.

Here it is in its entirety -

As a Catholic health care facility, we are an integral part of the Church's healing mission. Our service reflects God's compassionate love for all, the dignity of human life and the spirit of our foundress, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini.

Cabrini Malvern is a health care facility serving the needs of the community to the best of our ability, always striving for excellence. We respect life in all its stages and with staff in a spirit of partnership, we are committed to competent, compassionate care of all those we serve.'

Now when you realise that this hospital truly aims to live up to its 'Mission Statement' you can readily imagine what life is like for their patients (clients). Again, this isn't about claiming the existence of being 'perfect' – just an intention to work towards becoming perfect in the manner outlined by the Mission Statement.

So before you plunge your business into 'Mission Statement' madness, understand that if you put it in writing, you must then live up to every aspect. If you don't, your staff and

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customers will soon understand that what has been foisted upon them is nothing more than management froth and bubble.

Summary:

- Mission/Vision Statements can be a great 'guiding star' for your company.
- Gain input from all levels and areas of staff, suppliers and customers
- Build one that fairly represents both your idea of how you do things and what it is you'd like to be
- Refer to them constantly and use it as a framework to form and explain thinking
- Ensure new staff understand the expectations the statement makes about how they ought to go about their role
- If your business model changes, so should your Mission Statement to reflect the 'new reality, but do this BEFORE it is forced upon you

Quick Tip

If you feel you want to create a Mission Statement for your business, here's one way to go about it.

Write down the 5 single words important to you about being in business that cover off on these 5 points - Delivery style of business (how you do your do), Service Ideals, Customer Type, Business approach, ethical beliefs and community values. Now go and ask your good customers or potential customers for another 5 words that THEY feel are important about how they like your business to run. How about your potential or current suppliers? What about business people you know?

Once you've got your list, narrow down the field to one or two words in each category. Write a short paragraph that sums up your ideals and uses those words that you feel mean the closest to how your company will do its thing.

Check to see that the paragraph reflects both how you expect the company to go about doing what it does AND the future 'destination' it is headed towards

That's it. Speeches anyone?

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