

WHAT IS A MISSION STATEMENT AND HOW DO WE WRITE A GOOD ONE?

If you were asked, “what is the purpose of your life?”, how would you respond? It is not an easy question to answer but it is an important one. Most of us believe there is a purpose for our existence on this earth. But how to state it succinctly with meaning is the challenge.

In a similar vein, why do organizations exist? In a general sense, it is because by coming together they are able to accomplish something that they could not accomplish apart. But what keeps them “coming together” and not working against each other? Usually, there is some sort of statement that describes what unites organizations to achieve together. This is most often called a mission statement.

There are several key components of a good mission statement.

1. As already mentioned, a mission statement points the organization in a direction. This direction helps the organization makes tough decisions on competing priorities.
2. It describes the main actions of the organization. One way to get at this is to ask, “If your organization was wiped off the face of the earth, what would not get done for which your organization was responsible?”
3. It describes for whom the work of the organization is done. Who and/or what is being served by the existence of this organization? Is it students? Is it faculty? Is it research?

Another way of stating these first three components is that a mission identifies a 1. purpose, 2. actions, and 3. impact.

4. Last, but not least, it is short and clear. It is not a mission proposal or a mission paper but a statement. Statements are typically no more than two sentences but are best remembered when one sentence. The challenge is fitting in the purpose of your organization in as short a space as possible.

Let’s look at the [mission of Baylor](#) to see if it aligns with these components.

The mission of Baylor University is to educate men and women for worldwide leadership and service by integrating academic excellence and Christian commitment within a caring community.

1. Direction or Purpose – educate men and women
2. Actions – academic excellence, Christian commitment, caring community
3. Impact – worldwide leadership and service
4. Concise and clear – 27 words and one sentence.

SO HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT WRITING OR REVISITING A MISSION STATEMENT?

It could be one person takes one minute to draft this short statement. However, the best mission statements are more than just projects to complete, but a message that organization members agree describes their purpose. There is a difference between me telling you what your purpose is and you having an opportunity to participate in the creation and/or revision of the organization’s purpose. In order to increase the team’s buy-in, it helps to have them participate. In most cases, the mission statement already exists but most people in the organization know very little about what it says

Whether you are creating, reviewing, or revising it, there are some common tactics you can take to do this work collectively.

1. Invite people to participate. How often do we really take the time to re-examine our organization's purpose? What would it say to people to know that their input is valued and encouraged? This could be a small or large group – but discussions that allow for meaningful sharing are usually best with at least four people and no more than 15 or 20.
2. Allocate time. Typically, the more people you have present, the longer you need to give those people an opportunity to share. Remember that the product, a mission statement creation/review, is only one goal of this meeting; the primary goal is to give team members an opportunity to re-examine their reasons for doing what they do. Could this be done in 30 minutes – maybe. But I would suggest allocating at least an hour to an hour and half to demonstrate to the team that their contributions are valued.
3. Listen to each other. The most important way to build teamwork is by getting to know team members and learning to value their contribution to the team. Some people just need to say certain things before they are ready to begin the work of focusing on a mission statement. If the team does not know we care about their contributions, they are not going to care about the mission statement because they don't feel included.
4. Attempt to find and/or agree upon some shared reasons for the purpose of the organization. The exact wording of a mission statement does not have to be, and is sometimes best not, finalized at a gathering like this – that can be done by a smaller group focused on the intent of the larger group.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF STRONG MISSION STATEMENTS IN THE WORLD OF BUSINESS?

"The mission of Starbucks is to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time."

"The American Red Cross prevents and alleviates human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors."

"The mission of Google is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful."

"The mission of Southwest Airlines is dedication to the highest quality of customer service delivered with a sense of warmth, friendliness, individual pride, and company spirit."

"The mission of Make-A-Wish International is to grant the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions to enrich the human experience with hope, strength and joy."

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF WELL-WRITTEN MISSION STATEMENTS FOR UNITS AT BAYLOR?

"Student Activities strives to connect students to the life of the university."

"Athletics lives by One Standard – to faithfully steward the authentic pursuit of competitive excellence through Christ."

"The Baylor University School of Music provides transformational experiences that prepare students for careers in music."

"Public Safety provides safety and security for the Baylor family."

