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Mission Statements and Strategic Goals:

Bringing Businesses into Focus

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Introduction

FOCUSING A BUSINESS is a challenging but worthwhile pursuit, one that earns dividends as a business matures. Two ways to manage this project is by developing a mission statement and defining strategic goals.

Mission Statements

Forming a mission statement is an important component of leadership and business development because it clarifies and strengthens an organization's focus. A business vision in written form, a mission statement affirms an organization's goals and priorities, justifying business practices and identifying values. Essentially, a strong mission statement reminds a business owner why s/he opened for business in the first place.

Although motivational, the declaration needn't be wordy or long. In fact, the more concise it is the better, because it will be easier to read, remember, or even memorize.

For example, note the succinct statement that Padlock Ranch, a Wyoming ranching operation, offers: "It is our mission to manage the resources and assets of the ranch for long-term sustainability, while conserving and improving our environment and communities." JBS USA, the world's largest producer of protein, provides a more assertive one, avowing that "Our mission at JBS has remained the same for more than 60 years: to be the best in all that we do, providing superior products and services to our customers and the opportunity of a better future for all our team members." AGCO, a global leader in the design and manufacture of agricultural equipment, is straight and to the point in theirs: "Profitable growth through superior customer service, innovation, quality, and commitment."

Core Values Spotlight

Jim Collins, a business consultant and best-selling author, developed “The Hedgehog Concept” to discuss the nature of business leaders, a concept that aptly informs others about defining core values and their relation to forming mission statements (Collins 2001). He partly based his ideas on a parable written by the ancient Greek poet Archilochus that compares the difference between a fox and hedgehog (and which was made popular by social and political theorist Isaiah Berlin’s 1953 essay, “The Hedgehog and the Fox”).

In the story, a cunning and brilliant fox is so sure that he grasps the complexity of the woodlands around him that he sets his mind on eating a hedgehog. As a result, he spends many hours plotting the perfect attack. Meanwhile, the hedgehog, a simplistic and somewhat drab creature, goes about his business, completely unaware of the fox’s ill plans. But when the fox ambushes the hedgehog, the supposedly unremarkable animal surprises him by rolling himself into a spiny, impenetrable ball.

Undeterred, the fox strategizes and re-strategizes, ensuring that the futile pattern will merely continue to repeat without success, hence inspiring the bard’s famous line, “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.” For our purposes in writing a mission statement, the story illustrates the virtue or value of consistency: businesses that devote themselves to creating what they are best at and avoid straying from those strengths will stay in business during rough patches, while businesses that adopt too many competing ideas will lose their focus.

Developing Your Own Mission Statement

How do you construct a mission statement? The process should not be difficult. However, because mission statements provide a foundation for a company’s future, first identify the key concepts, particularly your company’s core values, for maximum effect. Brainstorming exercises are especially helpful in this regard, for they can help to build usable ideas prior to completing a rough draft.

Core values are central, powerful drivers of any strong mission statement, so let’s briefly define and discuss them. Core values are principles that guide an organization’s internal conduct as well as its relationship with the external world. Examples include hard work, honesty, integrity, and the desire to provide quality products. They thus form the underlying theme of a mission statement—they come from your passion for business and keep you aligned with who you are—so take care when identifying which ones apply to your business.

Now that you understand the basic idea of a core value, please complete the following exercises.

Step 1

Write down 3–7 core values you think represent your enterprise. Table 1 provides a list of values to help you start brainstorming.

Table 1. Core Value Chart.

Family	Security	Knowledge
Service	Innovation	Honesty
Integrity	Stability	Competition
Confidence	Reliability	Happiness
Efficiency	Loyalty	Advancement
Balance	Involvement	Reputation

Table 2. Template example of the business management process.

Mission Statement: Our mission is to deliver the finest quality alfalfa hay to our dairies and to ensure maximum performance in our animals, while we strive to remain profitable by enhancing sustainable practices on our land, for our customers, and with our families.					
Strategic Goal: Target marketing to all dairies					
Tactical Goal: Social media marketing		Tactical Goal: Face-to-face marketing		Tactical Goal: Develop and maintain consumer confidence	
Operational Goal: Develop and maintain social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter).	Operational Goal: Develop and maintain a web page	Operational Goal: Visit all dairies	Operational Goal: Share alfalfa-quality test sheets	Operational Goal: Invite current and potential customers to a field-day lunch	Operational Goal: Provide current operations and capacity statistics

Once you have completed writing your strategic goals, schedule time to review them with your team. If your team has proven strong and capable, go over your goals frequently with them. Goals are designed to create focus, so the more you reinforce the former the better for your business. At the very least, review the strategic goals often enough so that team members realize their importance, but not to the degree that it interferes with your team’s ability to execute them.

Summary

Mission statements and strategic goals channel the energy of a business in a beneficial direction. Without them, an owner may struggle to implement

a strategic plan. Indeed, without spending time thinking about her/his visions for the future and what s/he needs to do to achieve them, a business owner will likely fail to meet most if not all goals set. Putting thoughts in the form of a mission statement and strategic goals, however, can keep this from happening. They are highly useful tools that help to clarify decisions that affect a business enterprise over both the short and long term.

Further Reading

Collins, Jim. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . And Others Don't*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.