

LeaderPerfect Newsletter

April 1, 2012

Four Vital Questions for Your Mission Statement

by Dr. Mike Armour

This is the final article in a three-part series on writing powerful vision and mission statements..

In the [first installment](#) we outlined the distinction between the two and examined how they relate to each other. Our [second installment](#) then explored four vital qualities of vision statements.

In this newsletter we examine the underlying structure of a good mission statement. In particular, we want to identify four critical questions that your mission statement should answer.

The Present State, Future State Contrast

We've said that your vision statement is a broadly-worded description of where you want to go or what you want to become. By its very nature, a vision statement is grounded in the future. And it looks at that future in terms of what you want to do, not so much in terms of how you will do it. Laying out the "how" is the job of your mission statement.

Whereas vision statements are future-focused, mission statements outline what you are doing today — in the present — to advance your vision. In effect, a mission statement sets forth the rationale for the things that the organization does and the manner in which it does them.

Of necessity mission statements are longer than vision statements, because they are more detailed. But they still need to be succinct and typically should not exceed two sentences in length.

Within this language, mission statements typically answer four vital questions:

1. Who are our target customers?
2. What type of products, services, or solutions do we provide them?
3. How do we go about delivering these products, services, or solutions?
4. What makes our products, services, or solutions distinctive, or even unique?

Ronald McDonald's Vision and Mission Statement

Because of the long-lasting and widespread success of McDonalds, their vision and mission statements are frequent subjects of study.

McDonalds has chosen a vision statement that describes what they want to be known for rather than where they want to go. Here is how they word it:

To be the world's best quick service restaurant experience.

They then cast their vision in this mission statement:

To provide the fast-food customer food prepared in the same high-quality manner world-wide that is tasty, reasonably-priced and delivered consistently in a low-key décor and friendly atmosphere.

Notice how the mission statement supports the vision statement. And also note how the mission statement answers the four key questions above:

1. Who are our target customers? *Fast-food customers worldwide.*
2. What type of products, services, or solutions do we provide them? *We provide food that is tasty and reasonably priced.*
3. How do we go about delivering our product? *Our food is prepared everywhere in the same high-quality manner and served in a low-key decor and friendly atmosphere.*
4. What makes our product distinctive? *Our product is reasonably price and the quality is consistent anywhere in the world.*

Our Own Vision and Mission Statements

To cite another example, let's look at the vision and mission statements for my own company, Strategic Leadership Development International. Inc. We state our vision this way:

We equip leaders anywhere in the world to develop the full potential of their organization.

Our mission statement then elaborates on this vision with these words:

We help executives and entrepreneurs to build strong, healthy organizations by excelling in their most critical roles and responsibilities. We provide professionally-delivered, high-value leadership development programs, customizing our services specifically for each client and serving the needs of leaders in every sector of the economy — public, private, and non-profit.

Again, let's apply the four questions to this statement.

1. Who are our target customers? *Executives and entrepreneurs in the public, private, and non-profit sectors.*
2. What type of products, services, or solutions do we provide them? *We provide leadership development programs.*
3. How do we go about delivering this service? *Our programs are professionally delivered and have a high-value content.*
4. What makes our services distinctive? *They are customized specifically for each client to help the client excel at his or her most critical roles and responsibilities.*

Are you getting the hang of this? Every unit within an organization should have its own mission statement, whether its customers are internal, external, or both.

Does your organization have a mission statement? If so, how does it measure up against these four critical questions? How could it be tweaked to make it more effective?

And if you don't have a mission statement, why not start developing one? Just working through these four questions is an exceptional exercise in helping any organization sharpen its focus and its priorities.

© 2012, Leadership Development Corporation

This article may be posted to a web site so long as all copyright notices are preserved, along with an associated link to www.leaderperfect.com. You are also free to circulate this document in hard-copy form so long as the copyright statement and this notice remain attached.