

# ***LeaderPerfect Newsletter***

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## **Writing Powerful Vision and Mission Statements**

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For most people the word "powerful" is probably not one that comes to mind when they think of vision and mission statements. But well-articulated vision and mission statements are indeed powerful. And vital to enduring success.

Multiple studies have shown a direct and quantifiable correlation between clearly articulated vision and mission statements and overall corporate performance, with particular benefits to employee engagement and retention.

To treat the writing of vision and mission statements as merely an academic exercise is to miss their true potential.

In this issue I want to begin a series of articles on how to put together powerful vision and mission statements. I will be using the same template that I teach my clients on this subject.

Incidentally, my view and approach is just one of many that you will find offered by coaches and consultants. So don't feel that you've violated some indelible law of the universe if you choose to take a different approach.

### **Vision and Mission: What's The Difference?**

In this first installment in the series, I want to focus on the difference between vision statements and mission statements. What distinguishes one from another?

There is frequent confusion on this point. You see this confusion by merely perusing the mission statements of the Fortune 500 and Inc 500 companies, which you can find at [MissionStatements.com](http://MissionStatements.com). What many companies describe as their mission statement is more nearly a vision statement as I use the term in this series.

A simple way to see the distinction is to note the difference between a person with a vision and a person on a mission. Men and women with a vision have a view of the future and what it will look like. But they may develop the vision without immediately having a plan to achieve it.

Men and women on a mission, by contrast, are focused on a plan of action to accomplish what they have set out to achieve.

Vision statements and mission statements maintain this same distinction. The vision is a picture of a desired result or reputation that may lie years into the future. How many years? There's no fixed rule. The time period should be no less than five years. But it may stretch out decades beyond the present moment.

As an example, one non-profit organization devoted to Alzheimer's research has as its vision, "A world free of Alzheimer's." Even with the promising advances made against this disease, this vision is not likely to be fulfilled until well after today's leadership in the organization has passed from the scene.

## Two Types of Vision Statements

Vision statements come in two varieties.

- Many, like the vision statement of the non-profit above, lay out what the organization wants to achieve.
- Others paint a picture of the reputation that the organization strives to attain or maintain for itself. An example is Google's vision statement: "We organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful."

For my own company, I have chosen this second style of vision statement. It states how we want to be known in the market place, not some long-term future achievement that we dream of accomplishing. Here's how we word it: "We help leaders anywhere in the world develop the full potential of their organization."

Vision statements do not characteristically address the question of how the vision will be achieved. They leave that to the mission statement.

Mission statements describe what the organization will do over the next two or three years to move closer to fulfillment of the vision. This description of the mission is worded in broad, general terms and should not be more than one or two sentences long.

Mission statements become the framework, however, around which we establish specific action plans, intermediate and long-term goals, and milestones to reach these goals.

Within the wording of the mission statement should be a series of critical elements that we will outline in the third article in this series.

## Values, Vision, and Mission

I trust that it goes without saying that both vision and mission statements must carefully align with values. In December I devoted an issue to the three types of values around which companies must define themselves.

We described these as core values, strategic values, and operational values. Vision statements must fully align with core values. So before writing a vision statement, you must first gain clarity on your core values.

Unlike strategic and operational values, which may change as strategies and circumstances change, core values remain constant. Core values might find expression

through any number of vision statements. But vision statements are riveted to core values. To depart from the corporate core values invalidates any vision.

The vision statement then gives rise to certain strategic values, values over and above the core values, that are essential for achieving this vision. And these strategic values then become the container within which we develop our mission statement.

In the next issue we will look at four considerations to which you should devote careful attention in fashioning a vision statement. And we will look further at the two types of vision statements we have referred to.

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