



SMALL BUSINESS NEWS

A continuing series dealing with issues of interest to small business

A Business Planning Tool: Creating a Mission Statement

by Ruth A. Sheets, MBA

You left the rat race to start your own business but have you ever wondered why you go to your office every day and do the things you do? Are you so busy doing everything that you have lost sight of why you went into business? Have you lost your focus? Do your employees lack an understanding of how what they do fits into the big picture? If you answered yes to any of these questions, perhaps you need a mission statement or the one you have should to be revisited.

Every organization must have a mission – a reason for being or a purpose. A mission statement is simply a written down reason for being. It defines your business. It is a statement that says who you are, what you do, why you do it, and whom you serve. It should reflect the organization's values, the basic principles or beliefs that guide the actions of the company members. Ultimately your mission should drive the organization. Every decision you make should further that mission. Every action you take should work toward accomplishing that mission.

What makes a great mission statement? Most experts agree that a mission statement should be no longer than a paragraph, should be easily understood by a twelve-year-old, and should be able to be recited by memory at gunpoint. It should be free of jargon. It must resonate with the people working in and for the organization. It should be direct and powerful, simple and honest. It should be inspirational and motivational. The statement should be neither too narrow nor too broad.

A company's mission will be shaped by many elements. Unless a company is a start-up, every company is shaped by its history. A second consideration is the current preference of the management and owners. However, to get buy-in, employees need to be part of the process. Another influence is the market environment, which defines the opportunities and threats that each company faces. Additionally, the company's resources will determine its ability to achieve its mission. Finally, the organization should base its mission on its distinctive competencies the product or service that it provides that is unique.

Once you've created your mission statement, make it a part of the organization's culture. Walk the talk. Reward employees for living the mission. Celebrate the statement. Post it in the workplace. Use it in your personnel manual and on your sales and marketing pieces.

One last word on mission statements...clarity is power and a company is living either its own mission, or it is living someone else's.

Ruth Sheets of Ducks in a Row Consulting provides strategic business consulting to start ups, fix ups, and build ups to turn business pains into business gains. With an operational and marketing focus Ruth works with companies in various stages of transition to launch new products and services, target new markets, eliminate barriers to business viability, and establish and achieve business goals. To obtain more information about Ruth Sheets and Ducks in a Row Consulting please visit www.ducksinarowconsulting.com or call **978-463-2264**.

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