

Mission Statements: Why and How to Develop a Successful Mission Statement

The mission statement jargon originally seemed like just that to me – jargon and I say that with a sneer in my voice. One of the dictionary definitions for jargon is “unintelligible or meaningless talk or writing; gibberish”. If you don’t believe me feel free to look it up at dictionary.com. That definition was exactly how I viewed the idea of developing and using a mission statement. Eventually though, I got to see the mission statement in action and I began to feel quite differently about it. If you are not familiar with the concept of developing a mission statement for your business, let me give you a brief explanation.

Every business has a reason for its existence – whether it is a product or a service they provide or maybe even both. Their existence answers either a want or a need of the consumer. Consumers experience a need for a product or service when they must have either to maintain their very existence. Some common needs are the need for water, food, and shelter. Wants fall in the category of things consumers do not need for basic existence but rather they simply have a desire for the product or service as it will enhance their life. For example, jewelry, art, and entertainment electronics usually satisfy a customer’s wants. A business’ mission statement must identify its reason for existing and explain how it will fulfill that reason. A good mission statement will state all of these clearly using measureable criteria and will address what it hopes to achieve in the future as well.

My first encounter with the mission statement came in the early 90’s when I worked for a medium-sized chain of retail stores that offered convenience groceries, fast food and gasoline for sale. I worked in mid-management in this company and was actively though begrudgingly involved in helping to develop the corporate mission statement. It took several months of brainstorming and many rounds of revisions before the statement was complete and I believed that would be the end of it. I was happy to see the end of it and even though it was posted in all of the store locations and the corporate headquarters, I believed it would not make a bit of difference. Boy was I shocked when that mission statement started acting as the guiding principle behind most of the decisions that were being made. Without giving away the business by telling you the exact mission statement (which is to this day still proudly displayed all over their retail locations), I can tell you the mission statement centered around the idea that the customer was king and the main focus of the business was to focus on satisfying the customer. Let me give you some examples as to how this statement drove the business operations. It made stores hire more employees so customers only had to wait a few minutes at the register before being checked out. It made the store clerks treat their customers more kindly and if they didn’t they were reprimanded and even terminated if the problem continued. It even caused the stores to take bathroom cleanliness more seriously because customers hate dirty public restrooms. All areas of operation were assessed and evaluated based upon this principle and if they didn’t meet the criteria of the mission statement they were changed or eliminated. The result of this corporate overhaul based on a mission statement

was continually rising sales, happy customers and a company that is considered in the top of its business in the states it does business in.

Do you think I became a mission statement believer as a result of this experience? You better believe it. And I strongly suggest you create a mission statement for your business. To begin this daunting process, you must keep these three questions in mind:

1. What is the purpose of your business? In other words what wants or needs are you in existence to satisfy?
2. What are you doing to satisfy this purpose?
3. What principles or beliefs guide your work? Or what are the values of your organization?

If you answer these three questions in your statement and do so in a clear, quantifiable manner you will be able to successfully guide your business in all of its operations using your mission statement. Let's take a look at some examples.

If you are planning to open your own shop or studio, you must first identify what wants or needs you are trying to satisfy. Are you planning to sell just decorative painting supplies or are you going in to other areas of art besides decorative painting? Are you planning to offer educational classes and if so, what subject areas will you be addressing? Once you've refined this part of your decision you can make a statement about it. For example if you decide to offer only decorative painting supplies and classes your statement could include the following: "ABC Studio will provide a full line of decorative painting supplies complimented by supporting educational classes" This statement clearly identifies the customer's wants you will satisfy and the results are measureable. A full line of supplies will indicate that you will be well stocked with all decorative painting supplies and your classes will only relate to the products you sell.

Next you must identify what you will do to satisfy this purpose. You can provide this part of the statement with further information about the goods and services you will be offering. For example you can define your teaching staff with phrases like "educational classes provided by both an experienced in-house staff and various visiting instructors" or "educational classes provided by teachers with a wide and up-to-date knowledge of decorative painting". This information helps the consumers know the depth of ability you have to satisfy their wants and needs.

The last question you must answer in your mission statement allows you to state your personal beliefs about doing business as a decorative painting studio. What values guide you as a shop owner? What do you value as a business person? If you value having the newest products and techniques on the market, you need to state that. If you feel education and support of the artist is most valuable, it should be in your statement. If you feel convenient hours with a large, knowledgeable staff is most important, let your customers know that. Once you've put this all together, you will have a mission statement that will let your customer know what you are about as a business and what they can expect as a consumer.

Lastly, to make a mission statement really effective, you must keep it current and actually use it. Don't forget to re-evaluate your mission statement every couple of years. Your purpose or values may change over time and your statement needs to reflect that. And when making operating decisions about your business ask yourself how it relates to fulfilling the objectives of your mission. If you keep your mission statement in mind at all times when making decisions about your business, it will help to successfully guide you in ways you did not expect.