



tom brown
inside
leadership

Mission Statements

How They Fit In Overall
Organizational Direction

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Management is *not* the efficient organizing of confusion. Managers have a priority responsibility to clarify for everyone in an organization what it is “we are here to do.” Further, they have the responsibility to construct the bridges that connect the broad purpose of the organization to the daily “to do” lists of people grinding away at different tasks.

But too many managers fail to build the necessary bridges. And who suffers? The night crew coming in to sweep up, the administrative clerk processing piles of paperwork, the first-line supervisor helping a crew of machinists retool a manufacturing plant — even a senior manager overseeing a division of people. All of these individuals become debilitated on the job if there is a lack of focus about what they are doing and why.

Let’s personify the problem: Sitting across from me at a conference table one day, a department head in a manufacturing company stewed as she talked about the reigning chaos she saw impinging on the work lives of everyone around her. Her cigarette burned red, but her managerial fire was generating even greater heat.

After commenting that the overall direction of the organization was diffused and unfocused, she asserted that people were nonetheless working against the clock most days. But it did not seem to add up to any significant, identifiable result. “This,” she grumped, “is the way that work seems to get assigned around here: Picture a can of Ping-Pong balls, each labeled with

a task. The balls are then thrown up in the air and whatever department or person a ball hits, it hits.”

How does a manager prevent such frustration from blotting a sense of purpose and progress in his or her organization? The angry department head needed a mission and a set of guiding principles. She then would have been able to create a concrete vision of what it is that the entire organization was trying to achieve. With these guideposts, she could have derived a better understanding of the corporate strategies, superordinate goals, and, finally, her own individual goals and objectives.

A manager must be able to define these concepts for the operation he or she manages. How well could you convey the meanings? The precise elaboration will vary from company to company and from plant to plant. And the operational importance of each concept becomes much more specific as one moves farther down the organizational chart.

As a starting point, it will help to try to capture the basic context of each of the key words. Let’s structure it as a self-test: For your own company, group, division, operation, center, or department, can you define your...

Mission? What is the purpose of your business? Why does it exist? What is your commitment to your customer — inside or outside the company? Put another way, what is your contract with your customer for products or services? And — once again — who, exactly, is your customer?

Guiding principles? What is your general philosophy of doing business? Can you list the guidelines describing how people should behave at work? Can you state your deepest-held beliefs, attitudes, and ideals about why you’re in business to begin with?

Vision? Now, can you paint a clear, graphic, short, precise verbal picture of what you are striving to become in the short term — say, three years? How would you respond when a new employee asks, “What is OUR WAY of doing work here?” What is your operational style — and where is it supposed to lead in terms of achievement?

Strategies? What, precisely, is your “marketplace” for enterprise? (Remember, this can be inside a company.) Whom does your operation impact? What are your specific targeted approaches for gaining the support and patronage of that marketplace? What operational structures do you plan to create, or refine, to penetrate that marketplace?

Superordinate goals? There must be some goals, which support your strategies, that are embraced by everyone in the organization — shared ideals which prescribe a desired level of performance, for example. What are they? Can you list the focal points for action that are specific, measurable, action-oriented, relevant, and timely? How would you measure large-scale progress toward fulfilling the mission and guiding principles of the company?

Individual goals and objectives? Whether discussing an individual operating unit within a company or an individual person, can you identify the ways that people are going to spend their time, utilize the available staff, allocate precious budget dollars, and dedicate their personal energy so that the mission and guiding principles of the company are never reduced to just so much irrelevant, hypothetical babble?

An organization that can't define why it exists or how it operates — or what it is that it will do in the months ahead — is more than just a managerial “tragedy.” Such an organization will ultimately be seen as an obvious dinosaur — vainly groping to survive in a world that does not share the least motivation for helping it along.

Tom Brown is a champion of vanguard thinking about leadership. The author of hundreds of articles, he also wrote the first online book on leadership: *The Anatomy Of Fire: Sparking A New Spirit Of Enterprise*, which explores the look and feel of leadership in the 21st Century. To learn more about Tom, including his major role in *Business: The Ultimate Resource*, the largest handbook/database ever on managerial leadership, go to www.tombrown.us.

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