

# You're Never Too Small for a Mission Statement

By Bob Normand

**SUMMARY: A well written Mission Statement is the essence of purpose in your business. Without a clear understanding of your business purpose, the company drifts from idea to idea and scheme to scheme. The Mission Statement captures the essence of your business and core values in one to three sentences. With it, you stay focused on being the different and better than the average. A Mission Statement becomes your creed and should be communicated to customers, employee associates, vendors, investors and the community at large.**

## **Why You Need a Mission Statement**

Many small business owners don't write a Mission Statement because they feel their reason for being is too obvious. A car repair shop is a car repair shop, a two-man painting service is a just a painting service, right?

OK, but only if you want to be just another me-too business. But remember, the primary reason for long term, above average success in business is that somewhere along the line, the successful business has figured out how to be *better* or *different* than the rest.

Putting together a formal Mission Statement may seem like trivia, particularly to a creative Entrepreneur, but it can be a definitive moment in the direction of your company.

Here's what it does for your business:

1. It states the primary reason for your being in business
2. It sets market boundaries for the enterprise
3. It establishes standards for values and integrity
4. It keeps the company and management focused on it's primary purpose

As a small or fledgling business, if you don't write a clear Mission Statement, you don't know what you truly are or what you want to be when you grow up!

Where there is no clearly defined business purpose or context in which to operate, management tends to act on whims. The result is the company drifts strategically over long periods of time. Where there are no reasonable limits to your business concept, new ventures are pursued without thinking out the consequences and a small business can get off track easily.

A clearly defined Mission Statement keeps the company focused on what you are and what you are striving to become. The Mission Statement can help trigger an appropriate amount of caution and skepticism, as it should, concerning business proposals that deviate widely from your stated purpose.

## **What's in a Mission Statement**

A Mission Statement is a brief description, usually one paragraph or less, that captures the essence of your company values and your basic purpose for being in business. Your Mission Statement needs to be clear, succinct, and meaningful to outside readers and employee associates alike.

Here's an example of a well written Mission Statement from Big Blue (IBM Corporation, 2005 Revenues of \$91.1B, Net Profit \$8.0B or 8.8%):

**“At IBM, we strive to lead in the creation, development and manufacture of the industry’s most advanced information technologies, including computer systems, software, networking systems, storage devices and microelectronics. We translate these advanced technologies into value for our customers through our professional solutions and services businesses worldwide.”**

This statement is technically proficient, although it may be a little lacking in core corporate values, human and otherwise.

A Mission Statement can sometimes be described as a one-sentence simple phrase. Consider the Mission Statement of the Coca-Cola Corporation (2005 Revenue \$23.1B, Net Profit \$4.9B or 21%):

**“The Coca-Cola Company exists to benefit and refresh everyone it touches.”**

While this statement may at first seem overly simplified, if you read and think about it awhile you will begin to appreciate that Coke has captured the essence of their business.

Your Mission Statement should be definitive and not premised on the obvious. “To make a profit.” is not a good Mission Statement. While making a profit is essential to a healthy business, this statement says nothing about your product, service or values.

Here’s an example from one of the stars in the supermarket business: Publix Supermarkets (2005 Sales \$20.6B, Net Profit \$1.0B or 4.8%):

**“Our Mission at Publix is to be the premier quality food retailer in the world. To that end we commit to be: Passionately focused on Customer Value, Intolerant of Waste, Dedicated to the Dignity, Value and Employment Security of our Associates, Devoted to the highest standards of Stewardship for our Stockholders, and Involved as Responsible Citizens in our Communities.”**

I like this Mission Statement because it focuses on the human aspect of business which always includes customers, employees and community.

### **Use Your Mission Statement as a Creed.**

After you have captured the essence of what you are and are striving to be, you need to communicate it to everyone. It becomes your creed and should be a public statement suitable for distribution to customers, vendors, employee associates, investors and anyone else wishing to get to know your business. To communicate it, you can:

- Make it a topic of your monthly newsletter or e-zine.
- Frame it and hang it in your waiting room
- Include it as a forward in your Employee Manual
- Expound on it at your annual employee meeting
- Include it with a customer survey mailing
- Use it in a prospectus or strategic plan for outsider consumption

Until you've taken the time to write down your business values and purpose in a creed, you may well be looked upon simply as another purveyor of what you do. With a Mission Statement, you give credibility to your business and professional direction to your company.

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