



What is the Purpose of your company?

Why does your company exist? What's the purpose of the company; its raison d'être? Where is it going and how will it get there? It's important to develop this big picture to guide you and your people and to communicate your identity and purpose to everyone else.

From this starting point the drive and motivation is created to make it happen.

The vision and mission statements outline the purpose of an organisation; the vision statement reflects the long-term aspirations of the company and within this lies the mission statement outlines what the company will do to get there. Within this mission statement lies the strategy plan which completes the path from everyday activities to the direction of the company and how it will look in the future.

Do you have strong **vision, mission** and **value statements** that set the direction and tone of your company and which inspires you, your people, partners and customers?

Vision

Is your vision well understood and embraced by all in your company? If any of your people were asked what your company's vision is, would they be able to answer?

The vision statement reflects an aspiration; it paints a picture of where you see the company in say ten years time. Your vision is really for the benefit of the people in your company. It should encourage and inspire and bring everyone together, working towards the same goals. Even if you have started a company of one you should take the time to create a vision which will inspire and guide you as you grow your business.

A vision supports and crystallises a mission with a view of what will be if the mission is successful. It provides a framework within which the strategy plan resides and should inspire and motivate its employees to work together and drive company towards this future dream.

Key Points

All companies must have a purpose, a reason for existing. This reason needs to be as clear and concise as possible so that your people, your customers and other stakeholders understand why they should engage with you.

Having defined the purpose of your company you can create the big picture. What does this picture look like?

Only when you have this image clearly in your mind can you hope to communicate it to others.

Your *Vision* is your long-term aspiration. Standing on the bridge of your ship can you see your destination far on the horizon? That is your vision.

Great CEOs are visionary; it's what drives them and their people on. Creating a vision statement is not as hard as some make it out to be and you do not need to hire a team of consultants to create it. As the leader of your business you should already have this future picture in your head. Now, you need to articulate it.

If you are the head of a regional office, business unit or division within a corporation then you can develop a vision which sits within the corporate one. There should be a global vision from which you can create a European version. Your division may be responsible for a particular part of a product where, for example the corporate vision is to create the best business mobile phones and your vision could be to create the best user interface.

Make your vision achievable but ambitious. If it is not ambitious then you will be holding the company back from what is possible. If Henry Ford's vision was simply to build a motor car then he probably would not have achieved what he did or be remembered like he is. Instead his vision was to build a car that "no man making a salary will be unable to own and enjoy with his family the blessing of hours of pleasure in God's open spaces."

To help you build your vision statement, answer these questions:

- What drove me to start this company?
- How would my business look if it could be everything I dream of?
- What will it look like in ten years?
- What will the future needs of our customers be?

When you have created your vision statement does it?

- Inspire and motivate you and your people?
- Does it clarify and guide your future direction?
- Does it show you and your people the "big picture"?
- Does it bring everyone together?
- Do you and your people connect emotionally with it?

Vision Statement examples:

- Nasa: "To explore space."
- Nike: "To bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the World."
- Microsoft: "Create experiences that combine the magic of software with the power of Internet services across a world of devices."
- Apple: "To make a contribution to the world by making tools for the mind that advance humankind."

Key Points

Use your vision to inspire your people. Show them the destination and get them fired up to do their bit to make sure that, together, you reach it safely.

It's not difficult to create a compelling vision. For a start it should already be in your head.

If you are struggling to form a compelling statement imagine that you are explaining it to someone who is not involved in your business but who you wish to be excited about it. Imagine the questions that person would ask and refine your answer until you imagine that person having an "Aha" moment.

Once you think you have your vision set try it out on colleagues, friends and family. If you're not wowing them then the problem isn't with them but with your message. Take constructive feedback on board and keep refining.

Your vision is the framework within which all you and your people do work within.

- Toybox: “Our vision is of a world where there are no street children, where families are restored, those who are disadvantaged have choices and hope and all children have a voice.”

Having created an inspiring vision which is powerful, excites and stretches the imagination, you have a foundation on which your company can build.

Mission and values

Your company’s mission statement should describe what you do, why your organisation exists and how you intend to achieve your vision.

The mission is for the benefit of those outside of the company whether customers, partners or other stakeholders. It defines an organisation’s role in the market and should create a unique reason for being.

As CEO you know the business you’re in so you just need to define it. It is important to get right, not just factually, but in the way it is expressed so that it is understood and embraced by all your stakeholders including customers, partners and shareholders.

The Mission Statement should define what your company will do in the next three to five years and what it aims to achieve. The USS Enterprise had a five year mission to “Explore new worlds....” but it can be longer, for example NASA had a ten year mission to be the first to put a man on the moon.

The mission should have a statement of **purpose**. It should set out what it **intends to do** for its customers and the benefits it will bring to them and its **core values**. Here are the mission statements of those whose visions we looked at earlier.

- Nasa: "NASA's mission is to pioneer the future in space exploration, scientific discovery and aeronautics research."
- Nike: "To bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world. If you have a body, you are an athlete."
- Microsoft: "To enable people and businesses throughout the world to realize their full potential."
- Apple: “Apple is committed to bringing the best personal computing experience to students, educators, creative professionals and consumers around the world through its innovative hardware, software and Internet offerings.”

Key Points

Within this visionary framework sits your mission, a more detailed statement which outlines what you do and how you are going to achieve your vision.

Most mission statements are full of standard statements about servicing customers, looking after people, being friendly to the economy, etc. It becomes a long-list of ideals and though admirable, does nothing to inspire and differentiate. Be different and make it memorable.

A mission statement should be a statement of purpose outlining what you intend to do and your core values (how you intend to do it).

You and your people should be able to recite the vision and mission statements when asked and be able to talk around them. Knowing them and being able to communicate them will make it far more likely that they are embraced and supported.

- Toybox: “Our mission is to bring lasting and positive change to the lives of street children, street working children and those at risk of becoming so, through front line work, prevention and advocacy, being a facilitator and enabler, galvanising people and resources in the UK, Latin America and worldwide.”

We all have values and principles which guide and define us. These values are the foundations on which we carry out our lives. An organisation is also defined by its values, its core beliefs and its culture.

The beliefs and behaviour of the CEO will permeate throughout an organisation and can become as well known as the products the company sells. (*The Body Shop* is as well known for its policies on the environment as for its products which originated from its founder Anita Roddick.)

A value may be an aspiration, such as those large retailers who aim to only use recyclable packaging. They may not be there yet but the aim can make a difference to shopping habits.

Your beliefs and values can bring your people together and build relationships on an emotional level which can increase motivation, loyalty and bring the best out in your people.

You should not necessarily instil all your beliefs onto your company (your religious faith for example) and you shouldn't state anything that you're not willing to act on. And so, to start with at least, you may consider keeping them limited to those which you and others would expect the company to live by such as, investing in your people, looking after your shareholders and customers, building strong relationships with key partners and so on. As long as it rings true.

Last word..

Many start-ups and small businesses do not have vision and mission (and value) statements. Do not regard them as the confusing unmemorable rhetoric that many traditional statements appear to be but as statements that show the way, that motivate and inspire and on which your company will successfully build.

Key Points

The core values of a company can sometimes be just as important as the products and services it sells.

Don't create a set of values that you think are popular but which don't resonate with you. People will see through this thin veil and you could do more harm than good.

As a leader your behavior and beliefs will influence your people and can provide a guide to you during tough times.

These statements are important and should be given due consideration. If you work with a team of people then brainstorm them, try them out on others and keep refining until you're happy that they communicate all that you wish your business to be.