

# MISSION - POINTING THE WAY TO TRUE NORTH

- ▲ Mission gives organizations a powerful compass
- ▲ Clarity is a key to engagement
- ▲ Mission Statements, properly executed, provide leaders with a powerful clarity tool to deliver high performance



Recently, I had the opportunity to tour two beverage packing plants. While I was on the tours, I would ask the floor workers, "What do you do here?" The answers varied a little from employee to employee, but at each plant, the answers followed separate themes. **One group said, "We're making juice."** At the other plant, the answers were grouped around, **"We nourish people" and "We put smiles on people's faces when they're eating and drinking"**. Now, it is entirely possible that if you were to run a taste test between the two companies' apple or orange juice, you might or might not be able to distinguish them. However, I could easily point out the company that was getting better performance metrics all the way through to profitability outcomes. It was easy to see which group was engaged in what they were doing. **What made the difference?**

## Engagement Matters

Are your people engaged? Do they understand the “Why”? Actively disengaged employees alone cost the U.S. economy \$483 billion to \$605 billion each year in lost productivity. According to a recent Gallup survey, these workers represent only 16% of the American workforce. They are clearly not happy at work and are a drag on improved performance.

**The productivity that we enjoy comes from the 33% who are actively engaged and those who are simply “not engaged”. The sobering reality is that more than half of all American workers are “not engaged”.** This poses a large risk and an

equally great opportunity: While they are available

to be swayed to become engaged, absent clear, inspiring leadership, they can fall into the ranks of the disengaged. Given the compelling numbers demonstrated by those actively disengaged, management has a clear incentive to attract the members of the latter two groups to shift their mindset. A vital component of the effort needed to sway those in the “not engaged” and “actively disengaged” camps while ensuring continued engagement by the remaining 33%, is a clear mission for the organization.



## Dilbert is Right

In recent years, more leaders have grown their understanding of the impact culture has on an enterprise. As a result, mission statements have proliferated. The PR folks often spend hours crafting them. They have become so ubiquitous as to be sharply, and correctly, lampooned by the likes of Dilbert. In fact, go into any enterprise that has its mission statement on its website and see how many employees can actually recite theirs. **Easy stock tip: Invest in those companies whose employees can.** Simon Sinek, author of Start With Why, talks convincingly about why some organizations thrive whereas others only struggle to keep up. He points out that the successful enterprises are clear about why they exist long before they talk about how they go about it or what they offer. Mission statements done right help connect people to the purpose of the organization.



## Pointing to True North: Good Business

A typical response for many to what an organization's mission is? To make a profit. In reality, profit is an outcome of properly and successfully pursuing what the enterprise has set about doing. **Mission is what an organization does every day. It should be compelling enough that it gets people out of bed and ready to go.** In that sense, Mission must point at the Why, the purpose of the enterprise. It needs to be aspirational in nature and provide leadership with a means to help connect the dots from the Why to the What and the How of an organization.

Mission is the organizational equivalent of a compass. By declaring its mission, an enterprise states the direction it expects to follow and, naturally, where its "North" is. The end result, its North Pole, then, is the organization's Vision, usually characterized in a short, inspiring statement (see my blog: Compelling Destinations Drive Excellent Journeys).

Whenever I visit leaders and talk about the value of strongly crafted mission statements, at some point the following statement bubbles up: "Show me how this stuff moves the needle, then we can talk." According to Gallup, 4 in 10 U.S. employees strongly agree that the company's mission or purpose makes them feel their job is important. **By moving that ratio to 8 in 10 employees, organizations could realize a 41% reduction in absenteeism, a 50% drop in patient safety incidents and a 33% improvement in quality.** Those kinds of numbers ultimately drive improved outcomes, like those of the workers at the second packing plant.

## How They Did It

We talked with the leadership at the second plant to understand what created this kind of environment. They shared with us that they had pursued a steady plan of assessment, alignment, engagement and sustaining activity. They engaged in cultural surveys to understand the habits, attitudes, beliefs and expectations that existed within the plant and compared them with what they wanted them to be. They aligned their leadership by providing insight into their own mindsets and the impacts those mindsets had on the culture. When they had obtained acceptance of these insights by the leaders, they strove to engage the workforce by providing clarity through Mission and Vision statements and espousing the values they expected all to guide them in their everyday work. They spent time with the

employees discussing the values and what it meant to them personally. **And most importantly, they followed up - reassessing regularly to ensure that they remained aligned, making corrections as needed.** Through this process, they developed trust which fueled the mindset of all those at that plant.

Many enterprises take great care and dedicate precious resources to sharpen their external value proposition. If any of these issues matter to your organization, before thinking about how you go to market, be sure you have your internal compass set firmly and that everyone knows how to read it. Your employees will willingly take you there if they have a clear picture of the direction toward which they should be heading.

### Here are some well-crafted examples:

**IKEA:** To create a better everyday life for the many people.

**Honest Tea:** To create and promote great-tasting, healthy, organic beverages.

**Nordstrom:** To give customers the most compelling shopping experience possible.

**Vail Resorts:** To create the Experience of a Lifetime for our employees, so they can, in turn, provide exceptional experiences for our guests.

**Continuum Packing Solutions:** We transform your tastes into world class products.