

Breathe Life Into Your Mission Statement!¹

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All too often, managers in organizations create a lofty mission statement, post it on their internet site, hang copies on office walls, and print it on the back of business cards. After a time, employees hardly notice it. In fact, in many surveys I've conducted, people could not repeat the mission statement when asked.

These organizations miss a wonderful opportunity to align everyone—they fail to make the mission statement a truly living document by getting everyone involved in committing to it. What managers need to do is create a mission statement together with their employee and then *operationalize* it—this means translating it into behaviors that can be observed and/or measured.

To accomplish this, I use an 8-step strategy I call *The Mission Commitment Strategy*.

Following is a description of the steps. A few examples are given for each step, drawn from an automobile dealership that had an organizational purpose stated in their business plan, but no formal mission statement.

1. MANAGERS LIST THE PURPOSE OF THE ORGANIZATION—IT'S REASON FOR BEING.

The purpose of this dealership: Working as one organizational team, our aim is to exceed the expectations of our customers by providing them with high quality products and responsive customer service.

2. MANAGERS REACH A CONSENSUS ON SPECIFIC PLEDGES THEY WILL MAKE TO EMPLOYEES TO SUPPORT THAT PURPOSE.

- ◆ We pledge to provide the training and equipment you need to produce quality work.
- ◆ We pledge to give you the information, freedom, and authority you need to make decisions that satisfy customer needs.
- ◆ We pledge to promote and facilitate, constructive teamwork throughout the dealership.

3. EACH MANAGER SHARES HIS OR HER PLEDGES WITH THEIR EMPLOYEES IN DEPARTMENT MEETINGS.

They give everyone a copy of their pledges and discuss each one. They tell their employees to use the pledges as a set of guidelines to give them feedback on how well they are managing, assuring employees that their observations will be heard and respected.

4. EACH MANAGER THEN ASKS HIS OR HER EMPLOYEES TO MEET AS A GROUP AND REACH A CONSENSUS ON A SET OF PLEDGES THEY WILL MAKE TO SUPPORT THE ORGANIZATION'S PURPOSE.

- ◆ We pledge to perform our highest quality work in everything we do in the dealership.
- ◆ We pledge to continuously strive to do the highest quality job at what we do.
- ◆ We pledge to work as one team, cooperating with one another and with other departments.

¹ From: http://www.arniedahlke.com/100915_Breathe_Life_Into_Your_Mission_Statement.pdf
Please take a moment to look at Arnie's site: www.arniedahlke.com

5. AFTER EMPLOYEES REACH A CONSENSUS, THEY MEET WITH THEIR MANAGERS.

They share their pledges with their managers. They tell their managers to use the pledges as a set of guidelines to give them feedback on how well they are doing. They commit to hearing and respecting the feedback.

6. THEN, THE MANAGERS AND THEIR EMPLOYEES, TOGETHER, COME UP WITH PLEDGES THE ORGANIZATION WILL MAKE TO CUSTOMERS IN SUPPORT OF THE ORGANIZATION'S PURPOSE.

- ◆ We pledge to exceed customer expectations with a total commitment to the highest quality of our work.
- ◆ We pledge to exceed customer expectations with a total commitment to providing them with unsurpassed service.
- ◆ We pledge to exceed customer expectations by working effectively as a dealership-wide team.

7. NEXT, MANAGERS MEET AS A GROUP AND TRANSFORM THOSE PLEDGES INTO A FORMAL MISSION STATEMENT.

Our mission is to exceed customer expectations with a total commitment to unsurpassed quality, service, and teamwork.

8. THE FORMAL MISSION STATEMENT IS THEN MOUNTED ON EYE-CATCHING, FRAMED PLAQUES IN EVERY OFFICE AND DEPARTMENT IN THE ORGANIZATION.



Although it is time consuming, this 8-step strategy is an excellent way to:

- ◆ **Align everyone in the organization toward achieving the purpose of the organization.**
- ◆ **Give everyone in the organization an opportunity to experience themselves as an important part of the whole organizational team.**
- ◆ **Promote teamwork by getting everyone in the organization involved in translating the mission statement into everyday behaviors.**
- ◆ **Establish standards of performance for both managers and their employees that encourage each to be open to constructive feedback.**
- ◆ **Stimulate each person in the organization to feel an ownership of the mission statement as they live up to their committed pledges.**

The mission statement becomes the generic goal of the organization. Driven by the mission statement, performance standards and commitments are formulated at every level in the organization.

This 8-step strategy can be modified for use in organizations that already have a formal mission statement. Applying the strategy in those cases often leads to an improved mission statement.

