

THE MISSION COMMITMENT STRATEGY

Arnie Dahlke Ph.D.

January 15, 2010

All too often, 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.

What managers need to do is translate the statement into specific behaviors. An eight-step strategy I call *The Mission Commitment Strategy* is a useful strategy for getting this done.

This strategy systematically guides everyone in the company to come up with a series of pledges based on the mission statement. These include pledges made to customers and vendors, pledges managers make to employees, and pledges every person makes to each other.

I can best describe this eight-step strategy by illustrating it with an actual example of its implementation in an automobile dealership. The dealership managers began with their mission statement:



1. They decided to start the process by stating what they would pledge to their employees in support of the mission statement. Here's what they came up with:

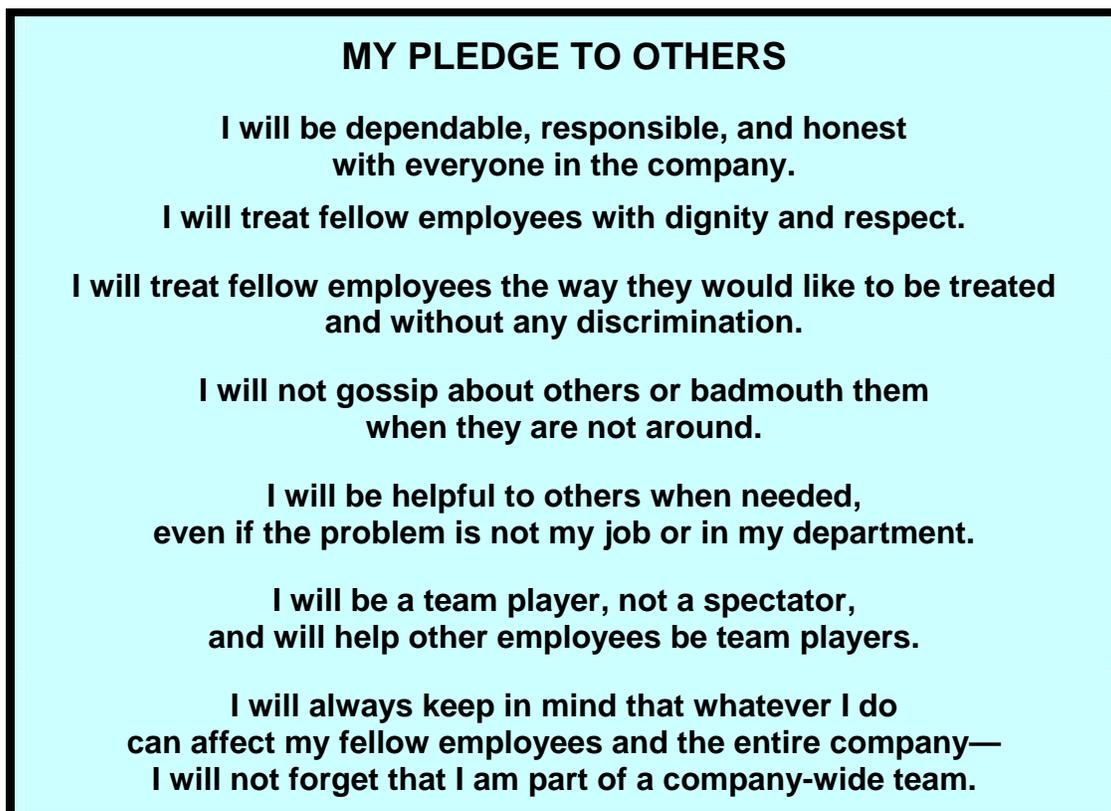
OUR PLEDGE TO EMPLOYEES

- ◆ **We will strive to lead by example, to walk our talk every moment of every day.**
- ◆ **We will set examples for you by uniformly following policies and procedures.**
- ◆ **We will treat you with dignity, respect and fairness, and work hard to gain your trust.**
- ◆ **We will listen to you and be considerate, sympathetic, and responsive to your needs.**
- ◆ **We will clearly communicate our expectations to you and make sure we understand your expectations of us.**
- ◆ **We will empower you by giving you the information, freedom, and authority to do your jobs.**
- ◆ **We will properly train you and then support and facilitate you, to help you do your best.**
- ◆ **We will acknowledge the importance of your contributions to our company.**
- ◆ **We are proud of our company and will do everything possible to make you proud also.**

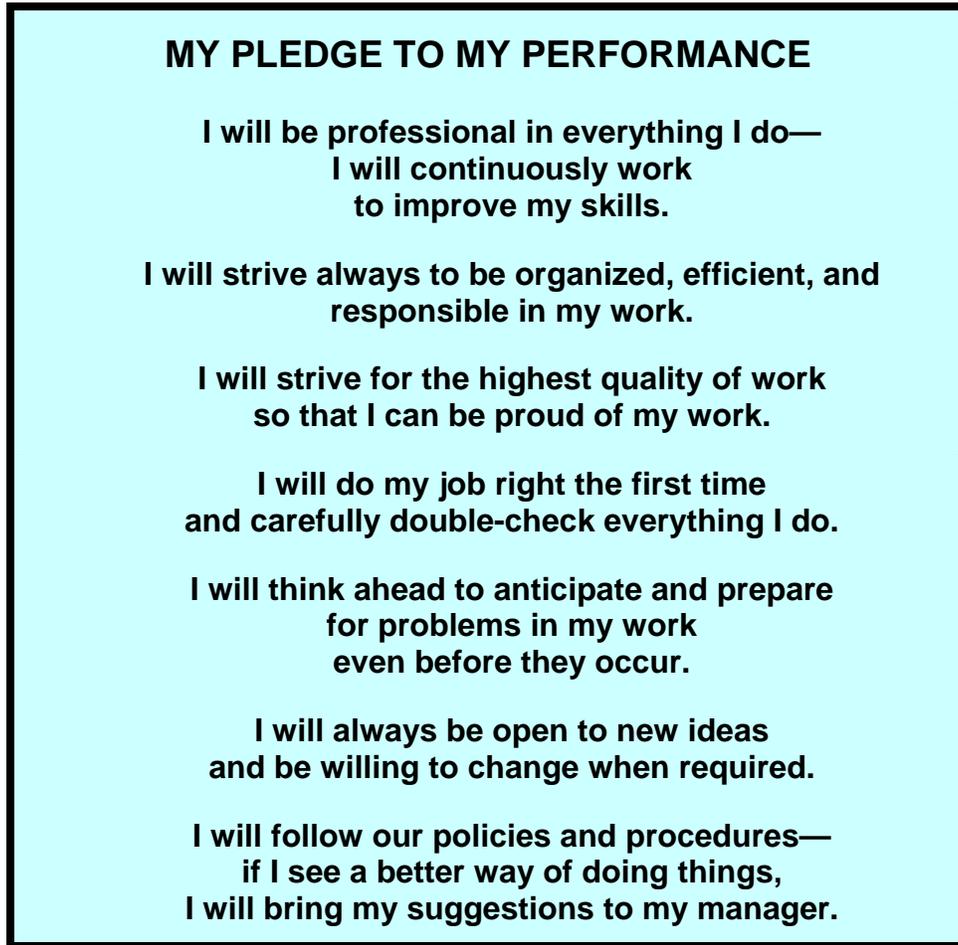
2. As the second step, each manager held a departmental meeting. They began the meeting sharing their pledges with their employees. They gave everyone a copy. They told them to use the pledges as a set of guidelines to give managers feedback on how well they were managing.
3. They then asked their employees to think about how the mission statement would guide *them* in dealing with customers. They asked for suggestions for pledges to customers that would illustrate people living the mission on a daily basis.
4. After each department group came up with a final set of pledges, the managers met and organized the results of their deliberations to come up with three major pledges to customers. They committed to one another that they would use these pledges as standards in meetings with their people. They posted the pledges in an attractive wooden frame and displayed several copies of it in key places throughout the dealership—they hung it on the wall behind each salesperson's desk, in the Business Office, at the Service drive, and so on:



5. At this point, managers asked employees to come up with pledges to each other and to themselves about their own job performance in support of the mission.
6. Employees first met in department groups and brainstormed pledges.
7. Then each group shared their ideas with other groups in several rounds of meetings that culminated in the choice of two sets of pledges. The first set consisted of pledges each person made to others:



The second set consisted of pledges made to themselves about their performance:



8. Finally, employees met with their managers in departmental meetings to share their pledges. As the managers did with them, they agreed to use their pledges as a set of guidelines for the managers to give *them* feedback on how well they were performing their jobs.

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

- ◆ Get everyone involved in translating a mission statement into everyday behaviors.
- ◆ Establish standards of performance.
- ◆ Stimulate each person in the company to feel an ownership of the company mission as they live up to their committed pledges.
- ◆ Gives each person an opportunity to experience him or herself as an important part of a the whole organizational team.

To summarize, a convenient way to think about *The Mission Commitment* is to picture the organization as a tree, as shown on the next page.

An organization grows from the organization's original vision and values just like a tree grows from a seed. The vision is shaped by the economy of the time and marketplace needs. It is then translated into a mission statement. The mission statement becomes a kind of generic goal of the organization. Driven by the vision and mission statement, performance standards and commitments develop at every level as the organizational tree grows and grows:

