M ost business leaders know that if they really want to achieve something, it helps to have a clearly stated purpose. Many also realize that describing what they want to become in the future is important. So they develop a mission statement to describe their company’s purpose and principles of operation, and they develop a vision statement to articulate their goals.

In many cases, though, employees can’t articulate their company’s mission, or it doesn’t affect their day-to-day behavior — be it in superior customer service, excellence or maintaining a competent staff.

The company’s leaders thus conclude that mission and vision statements don’t work, and they begin to look elsewhere for solutions. But the problem is right in front of them; it’s in the process. To develop effective mission and vision statements, companies must involve all employees.

**Personal relevance**

When deciding to develop mission and vision statements to help plan for the future, a company’s leadership team usually holds an executive retreat. The team hires a high-powered facilitator to help develop effective statements. They hammer on the language until everyone is satisfied. Then they congratulate themselves, play a few rounds of golf and enjoy a gourmet dinner.

On Monday morning, management holds a meeting to “communicate” the new mission and vision statements to the rank and file. Sometimes they ask the employees to buy in and sign the documents. Of course everyone does, but while their pens are signing, many are resisting and wondering: “This says we provide excellent customer service, so what about me? We’re supposed to go beyond customers’ expectations, but who cares about me? They want me to meet their objectives, but what difference does it make to me?”

To be effective, mission and vision statements must have personal relevance to employees, which means the statements should come from deep within the organization. Everyone — not just the top planners — should participate in a meaningful way.

If you want to grow your organization, you must first grow your people. When confident, competent people are committed to carrying out a company’s mission, the company becomes unstoppable.

**Employees as assets**

Look at your company’s profit-and-loss statement and scrutinize its assets. Why aren’t your employees listed?

Your people are your most valued asset. A recent University of Pennsylvania study showed that a 5-percent investment in materials helped increase bottom-line profits by 3 percent, whereas a 5-percent investment in employee development resulted in a bottom-line improvement of 8 percent.

We all have habits, attitudes and beliefs that we bring to work every day. Out of them, we develop the department’s habits, attitudes and beliefs. Further, departments have attitudes and beliefs about other departments within the organization. Some are useful and productive; some are not.

What habits, attitudes and beliefs are stopping your organization from an unprecedented performance this year? Are you developing a culture of high performance? How well your company does this year and in the future depends on how well your people want to do and how much they believe they can do.

When you stimulate a strong desire within your employees to achieve more, you create tremendous drive to succeed. What manager or chief executive officer doesn’t want a workforce of people who are driven to succeed and who see the connection between the company’s mission and their own?

**How to achieve goals**

Mission and vision statements often contain vague, boring and confusing words with no real life or heart. The people who are told they must live and work by them see no personal benefit in doing so.

But consider what happens when a confident, high self-esteem, engaged group of non-management people — a group that represents and speaks for the entire organization — develops a company’s goals. The organization’s culture becomes the driving force, rather than a few “motivational” words written by those at the top.

Often, goals defined by high-performance, confident, engaged groups of workers are bigger and bolder than those developed for them by executive teams. Not only are these goals...
Mission and Vision Statements

... Continued

achieved, but they also are often surpassed.

If the self-efficacy of the individuals inside an organization improves, watch what happens to the performance of the organization as a whole. When mission and vision statements are created by the people who will carry them out, they own them. They have an emotional attachment to them. They have a personal stake in them. That's how a mission and a vision are sustained over market shifts, economic spikes, regulation changes and even natural disasters.

What are you doing to create a high-performance, high self-efficacy culture within your company? How are you improving its collective habits, attitudes and beliefs? What plan or process do you have in place for this year and beyond to develop your people so that they can develop your company? How high a priority are these things now, and how high should they be?

As you consider your answers, remember this: The formula for building a fiercely competitive, highly successful organization is 1 percent clearly stated mission/vision statement plus 99 percent aligning individual goals to those of the company.

Mission and vision statements that reflect the shared vision and values of everyone in the organization can create great unity and tremendous commitment. They create in your people's hearts and minds a frame of reference by which they will govern themselves and manage their day-to-day activities. And they enable these people to own a piece of what your organization is all about. 


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