

## Killing the Mission Statement

Category: Planning

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The mission statement is probably the most outdated corporate invention of the last thirty years. The problem is that so many people are so intent on conforming to politically correct positions that they fail to communicate and simply regurgitate blinding glimpses of the obvious.

The template for a mission statement seems to be that it should be no more than five lines long, and written in staccato sentences that hit all the key buzzwords – customers, employees, integrity, profits and shareholder return.

Worse still, some of these “bulletins from Captain Obvious” actually find their way into corporate brochures. Do your customers really care that you are “focused purely on the local area” or that you plan to be “best of breed” or “make customer service the first priority”? They just want good products and services at a fair price and probably smile to themselves when they see you pontificating in your literature.

If you think about it, it is an absurd piece of egotism to take this final step, and these redundant and self-serving mission statements only land up in corporate brochures because they have been written with half an eye on the outside world in the first place. People think that they lend a sense of weight and dignity, but how many businesses will actually say anything new, useful and different in their mission statement?

A statement that establishes vision, strategy and direction is most definitely needed, but the “traditional” version of the mission statement seldom accomplishes this. What is needed is a vision statement, a road map that communicates the direction the company is taking.

It exists, first and foremost for the management, employees and shareholders of the company, and should address the following issues.

- **Core competencies.** Identify the products and services that are central to your core business
- **Business reach** Define parameters that govern where you will do business, the types of products and services you will offer and the kinds of customers you want.
- **Culture** Clearly state your values and how you expect to deal with employees, customers and suppliers.
- **Vision and Goals** Paint a picture of where the company wants to be in a three to five year time-frame

The vision statement should be communicated with your managers and should address such fundamentals as the products and services you want to offer and the type of growth you want to experience – a 40% growth rate calls for a very different culture than a 10% growth rate.

It should serve as a set of parameters that will determine what decisions are made. If it is clear that you only want customers in a certain industry vertical or geographical region, for instance, that should be spelt out in the vision statement and it will direct decisions by subordinates without needing to be referred to the CEO every time.

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And if it is really well done and if you really feel you must, you can even put it in your corporate brochure!