

# MISSION POSSIBLE

**“Build your mission statement the right way. Then bring it to life”**

By Dr. Chris Bart

**T**he reason your company exists is expressed through its mission statement. But do employees take mission statements seriously? Think fast! Name the most popular management tool of the past 25 years. Now, name the least respected. In both cases, the management tool in question is the “mission statement”.

Every company or organization, regardless of its size, must be able to articulate their mission. Whatever the phraseology, the reason for having a mission statement always seems to be the same: it's intended to capture an organization's unique and enduring “reason for being.” At its most basic, it should address some tough questions:

What is our business? Why do we exist? What are we trying to accomplish? Your mission statement is supposed to provide control over the actions and behaviours of employees and bring about a more focused allocation of organizational resources.

Research indicates that mission statements can make a positive difference to an organization's bottom line results – provided they are designed and implemented properly. To the extent that you answer “no” to any of the questions that follow, you are probably missing out on some of the real advantages that a mission statement can bring.

## **1. HAS THE MISSION DEVELOPMENT PROCESS INVOLVED A CROSS-SECTION OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS?**

The more that various stakeholders are involved in the process the better. This does not mean that everyone must be consulted. However, recognizing that the mission's implementation depends on both formal and informal leaders in an organization, their input should be solicited, considered and incorporated into the final document.

All of us have heard a valued employee lament “they keep saying it's our mission when it's really their mission. The guys at the top wonder why the mission doesn't succeed. The answer's simple. It's not my mission because I wasn't included and neither were any of my peers!”

## **2. DOES YOUR MISSION STATEMENT ANSWER THE QUESTION: “WHY DO WE EXIST?”**

At this point, we are talking about “purpose” and not “vision”. Vision is about achieving some bold, over arching, long-term goal. It is a destination. Mission, on the other hand,



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*Continued on page 5*

Continued from page 4

defines the enduring and quintessential nature of the organization—why the company exists. One of the most important considerations in creating a winning mission statement is to clearly specify the organization's values and to balance the competing interests of key stakeholders.

### 3. IS THE MISSION STATEMENT KNOWN TO ALL KEY EMPLOYEES?

Try writing out your firm's mission statement right now (without looking). Then ask your assistant and the new employee in the mailroom to do the same thing. Familiarity with the mission statement is the first step in its successful implementation. The bottom line is that if you can dream it, you can be it. But if you can't say it, you can't live it!

### 4. IS THE MISSION STATEMENT A DAILY PART OF ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE?

To what extent is your mission statement referred to in meetings between employees and management? To what extent do managers in your organization have to relate their plans and budgets to it? Does your firm's mission statement form the basis from which training, recruitment, promotion, reward and disciplinary programs are developed? And does your compa-

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ny's management information system report on progress against the mission?

When a firm does align its management systems and procedures with its mission, a very high level of performance can be achieved.

Please test your own organization's mission against the questions raised in this article to see where you may be missing the mark. When mission is aligned with the resources of a firm, the result is a juggernaut organization that rolls over competitors that have not developed the same degree of focus, dedication and commitment. 

*Dr. Chris Bart was the recipient of the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce HR Hero Award for 2005. He is the author of the best selling book "A Tale of Two Employees and the Person Who Wanted to Lead Them" and is a Professor of Strategy and Governance at McMaster University's DeGroote School of Business.*



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