

Building Mission Statements That Matter

When staff have an active hand in the development of a mission statement, they'll have a better grip on the company's mission—and success.

C H R I S T O P H E R K E N N E T H B A R T

Mission statements are everywhere, so it would appear that they must be important. And they are.

A mission statement is supposed to define an organization's fundamental reason for being. It should answer the extremely important question: Why does an organization exist? And, when completed, a provider's mission statement should guide the resource-allocation process and inspire important stakeholders (that is, those who have a "stake" in the success

Ontario Hospital Association, found that over 75 percent of respondents were dissatisfied with their organization's current mission statement. So, it is not surprising that many providers' stakeholders feel that most mission exercises are not useful.

But why is there this general disaffection for mission statements in general? Recent research suggests that there are a number of major mistakes that most organizations make in creating and managing their mission.

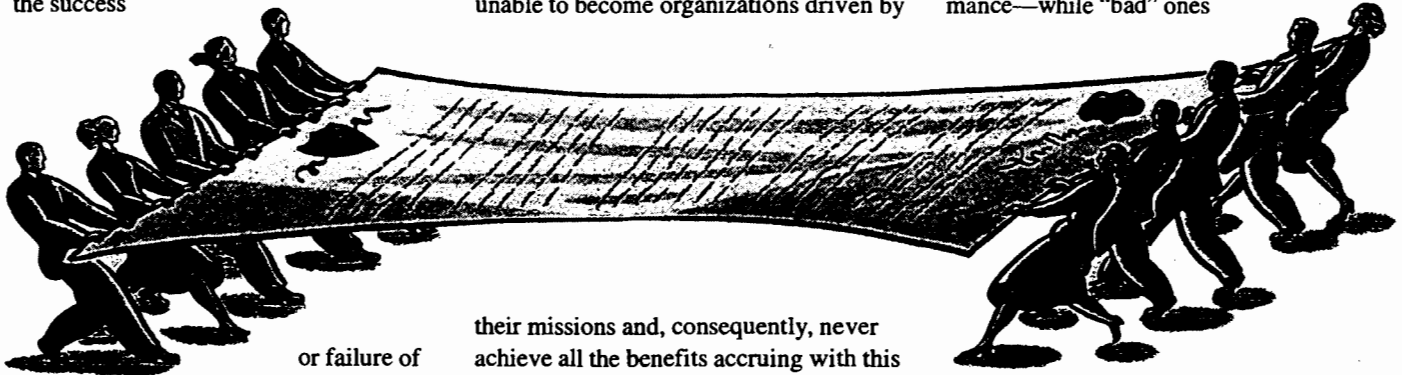
Because of this, some companies are unable to become organizations driven by

The nub of mission excellence appears to be making the effort to get all relevant stakeholders—from chief executive officer (CEO) to direct-care staff—involved in the mission-writing process. A quality process will yield a quality mission statement.

Mistake No. 2: Bad Mission Content

It may seem strange to suggest that long term care providers can have the wrong content in their mission statements, but it's true.

Not all mission statements are created equal. "Good" long term care mission statements contain certain content categories—which have been shown to be associated with enhanced performance—while "bad" ones



or failure of the organization), including senior managers, middle managers, front-line workers, and residents, to work toward the mission statement's ends.

Given these benefits, many management experts view the definition of a provider's mission as the cornerstone or starting point for any strategic planning exercise. There is also a growing body of evidence showing that superior performance benefits are associated with well-crafted and well-managed missions.

But many providers don't give serious attention to their mission statements. One 1996 survey entitled "Sex, Lies and Mission Statements," given in a presentation by the author to the Annual Meeting of the

their missions and, consequently, never achieve all the benefits accruing with this status.

Mistake No. 1: A Poor Process

For a mission statement to have the proper effect, it is best created using an organizationwide process that produces the maximum degree of personal ownership. Most mission statements are doomed to failure before they are even created because the senior management team creates them with a consultant, in isolation from the rest of staff.

This type of process will not produce a mission statement that will make everyone stand up and cheer. Front-line employees especially will not endorse or support a mission when they had little or no say in its creation.

don't. For example, a study of 103 Canadian hospitals (the author's "Mission Statement Content and Hospital Performance in the Canadian Not-for-Profit Health Care Sector," *Health Care Management Review*), tested the relationship between 23 mission content categories and seven performance indicators.

The study showed that nine mission categories were extremely popular: They were clearly specified in 50 percent or more of the mission statements. These nine categories included concern for patients and employees and statement of vision, values, and purpose.

However, when the 23 categories were correlated with performance, presence of

the most popular categories did not always correlate with satisfaction with the mission statement. On the other hand, some less popular categories—such as concern for society, distinctive competence, desired competitive position, and competitive strategy—demonstrated powerful performance potential. Thus, it appears that many mission statements fail to capture those mission items that drive a company's performance.

Mistake No. 3: Failing To Make The Mission Unique

While effective mission statements generally reflect similarities in content and language that are different from ineffective mission statements, it also is important that each provider create a statement unique to the needs and processes of its particular facility.

To help make this happen, it is important that the mission formulation process be led by a multistakeholder team. The team, in turn, should seek to regularly monitor and obtain feedback from its members' various constituencies regarding the emerging mission statement.

As long as key stakeholders (but, especially employees) feel that their facility's mission statement is unique and can explain specifically how it is different from those of others, then it is unique. Research has shown that such stakeholder perception of mission-statement uniqueness is a major differentiating characteristic between those high-performance organizations that are mission-driven and those that are not.

Mistake No. 4: Poor Communication Of The Mission

An interesting mistake senior managers often make is to assume that when everyone is involved in a mission statement's creation, there is little need for continuing communication about it. But that is typically a false assumption. Effective communication means that a message has been received, understood, and, perhaps most important, remembered.

For a mission statement to be a living instrument within any long term care fa-

Examples Of Mission Statements

Health Services Association Of The South Shore

Health Services Association of the South Shore is an active partner in building a health community by:

- **Providing compassionate, responsive, and skilled health care;**
- **Fostering an environment of mutual respect that recognizes the value of our staff and volunteers;**
- **Assisting in the promotion of wellness and prevention of illness by making these an integral part of all programs;**
- **Promoting health education for staff and the community; and**
- **Participating in and promoting research that will benefit the health of our communities.**

North York Branson Hospital

North York Branson Hospital is committed to being a leading community hospital that addresses all dimensions of human life. NYBH will meet the health care needs of the residents of the north central region of the Greater Toronto area by:

- **Providing a broad range of acute care services, including disease prevention and health education activities in the provision of acute care and offering health promotion programs to community residents;**
- **Drawing upon each caregiver's unique talents through an integrated team approach;**
- **Providing care with integrity, compassion, and respect; and**
- **Providing service with continuing excellence while managing hospital resources efficiently and effectively.**

Source: Health Services Association Of The South Shore and North York Branson Hospital

cility, it is important for each and every internal stakeholder to be able to recite the mission.

When internal stakeholders do not know their facility's mission (that is, know the exact words), they are prevented from taking that knowledge to the next step—understanding the words and what they mean for personal daily action. Memorizing the mission, therefore, is an important communication step because only then will individuals be able to refer to it and make the mission part of their day-to-day decisionmaking processes. To be sure, short mission statements (less than 60 words) facilitate their memorization and recall. Mission statements longer than 300 words should be avoided.

Of course, if managers expect everyone who reports to them to know and memorize the facility's mission, it is imperative for the managers to know it thoroughly themselves and to lead by example. It is also essential that the facility's top management group be able to recite the mission on a random but regular basis. Only then will the mission have any long-lasting and permanent effect.

To facilitate this process, one hospital's CEO starts every senior management team meeting by having the 22 vice presidents and directors recite the mission in unison. She then asks the team if there is anything on the agenda that is not relevant to the mission and tells them that, if there is, it should be deleted from the meeting's discussion.

So, relentless repetition of the mission is necessary for its institutionalization within any facility.

Mistake No. 5: Little Or No Alignment With Organization

Of all the factors important to making any mission a reality, it is the concept of aligning or matching the mission with the organization's goals and purpose that is the most critical.

This alignment of mission and organization refers to the degree of linkage that a mission has with the formal and informal systems, policies, and procedures that exist throughout an organization. When a

high degree of alignment occurs, all of a provider's organizational activities—such as planning, training, recruiting, and rewarding—support, facilitate, and reinforce the message in the mission.

For example, when hiring new staff, providers should try using their mission statements as part of the interview. It is

important to ask interviewees what they think the words mean and how they might make a contribution to the achievement of the mission.

High alignment of mission and organization has been linked to generally widespread satisfaction with and commitment to a mission. Internal stakeholders are sat-

isfied because they can see clearly that the mission is the focus. There are no mixed signals, employees know what is expected of them, and the mission message is reinforced through action.

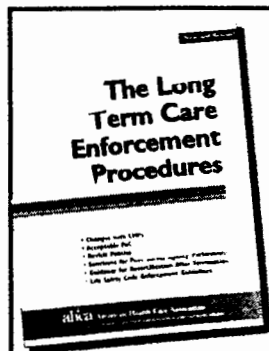
There are other mistakes that managers can make in the process of managing their mission—for example, poor leadership style, inappropriate communication vehicles, pushing the mission process too quickly—to name just a few. But the five mistakes listed above are the ones

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American Health Care Association

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providers most frequently make and which seem to cause the most problems.

If providers orchestrate their mission processes wisely and manage to avoid the major mission mistakes cited above, they will see dramatic improvement in their facility's performance and notice a major turnaround in the attitudes of stakeholders toward the facility's mission. ■

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