

The Dispatch

Family Business Insight for your Agriculture Company
May 2023: Don't Miss Your Mission

We usually don't see the phrases "mission statement" and "riveting reading" appear in the same sentence. That is, the formulation and sharing of mission statements often can be dull business. But your Dispatch staff has made a diligent effort in what follows to probe, in an interesting fashion, the purpose, practice and personal nature of mission statements. Lance highlights some of the benefits of such statements. Ethan takes the mission statement of a popular company (the music streaming platform Spotify) and examines it. Finally, Davon personalizes the concept by asking what an individual mission statement might look like. We hope you enjoy the essays and that you will let us know your reactions. [Bill](#)

Your Mission, Should You Choose to Accept It

[Lance Woodbury](#)

The origins of the corporate mission statement are many. Ultimately the idea of "mission" originated in the church where "missionaries" were sent to share the Gospel. Then the concept took root in the military, as in a "combat mission." By the 1970s, management gurus like [Peter Drucker](#) began using the phrase to clarify the purpose of a business organization. Here are three benefits I see to such statements:

- 1. They help give meaning to work beyond making money.** Most business owners find the profit motive necessary but not sufficient to keep people meaningfully engaged in their work. If an entrepreneur can make money in lots of ways, the key issue becomes why you choose to work in one business over another. That choice connects to something deeper in you or your family's history, and the mission statement is an attempt to capture that sense of passion for helping a segment of society in a particular way.
- 2. They offer psychological ownership and motivation to the teams who create them.** If done well, crafting a mission statement takes team members' individual ideas about the company's purpose and converts those into a team perspective, turning "I" knowledge to "We" knowledge and fostering a feeling of buy-in to the company. It can encourage loyalty, dedication, and passion for the organization and for the person's role.
- 3. They enable success.** Becoming clear about your organization's purpose helps you decide where you can be most effective, which in turn drives your competitive advantage: you improve on your areas of focus. A good mission statement serves as navigational beacon in a crowded sea of opportunities and risks.

Of course, there are plenty of bad examples of mission statements, and some efforts to create a mission statement can backfire if not facilitated well. But should you choose to work on your mission statement, using the language of the old TV show "Mission Impossible," the benefits to your company will be positively evident and may even "explode" shortly after reading this edition of the Dispatch!

Drawing Insight and Inspiration from Spotify

[Ethan Smith](#)

Through interactions with clients, we have the opportunity to help them put their strategy cap on and write out their mission statement. I recently was working with a family on this task and came across a mission statement that really stuck with me. The mission of [Spotify](#), the music streaming platform, is this:

“To unlock the potential of human creativity – by giving a million creative artists the opportunity to live off their art and billions of fans the opportunity to enjoy and be inspired by it.”

As someone who shells out \$14.99/month to subscribe, I’ve never thought about listening to music in the same context as “opportunity.” Yet, reading their mission statement shifted my mindset from listening to artists and songs that I like over multiple genres to feeling connected to endless song choices (82 million per Spotify) that can inspire my productivity or happiness. That is what a mission statement should do.

The mechanics of a mission statement should answer three questions: What? Why? How? It describes the fundamental purpose of the organization, why it exists, and how it achieves its broader vision.

Once you have an answer for those three questions, test them. Here are some common tests for mission statements. Does this show how I’m moving toward my “big” vision—every day? Can it be the guide for me, my family, or my employees? One point of caution – don’t confuse it with aspirational goals. Mission statements describe what, why, and who you are now, not where you want to be.

Most of our businesses may not have the time, or dollars, to come up with something crafted and powerful like Spotify. However, try to answer each of those questions for your business based upon your family values and shared passions.

Blooming

[Davon Cook](#)

Let’s look at the concept of “mission statement” from a personal, rather than business, perspective. A couple of years ago I facilitated a peer group’s conversation on Stephen R. Covey’s iconic book, [The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#). While many aspects of the book are helpful, at that moment the personal mission statement resonated with me. The book encourages us to boil our passions, values, drive, and goals into [marching orders](#) to apply every day. Where did I land?

“Bloom where you are planted. And tend to others so they can do the same.”

This emerged from reflections on what matters most to me. I have lived in eight homes across three states and had four distinct phases of my career in completely new situations. In some ways, I thrive on new challenges. Yet one of those relocations was very difficult for me. With doggedness and determination, I try to find a way to bloom regardless of the location I’m planted. I value having roots in my community, church, and workplace. So even though I travel often, I prioritize time to be involved locally and to build friendships—even when it takes scheduling a walk two weeks ahead! And I bloom from helping tend to others: through friendship, mentorship, giving, advocacy.

The blooms on a cotton plant are a visible sign of progress. Each bloom turns into the fluffy white fruit of harvest. When the whole field has bloomed yellow and pink flowers, it is a beautiful sight and a preview of a bountiful harvest to come. Thus, it’s a metaphor that speaks to me.

I see those words hanging on my wall every day. I try to use this mission statement to keep me focused when prioritizing time and resources, or when I’m discouraged. What is *your* personal mission?