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COLLABORATION HEALTH CARE

ALIGNING IDEAS WITH EXECUTION TO IMPROVE HEALTH CARE TODAY



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Is A Mission Important?

One of the key ideas we try to get across in our work with clients is our belief that having a clear definition of who you are and what you do can be a key predictor of the success of any organization or project. Especially in health care, having a clearly defined mission that is an integral part of your make-up, can help you adjust to the continuous changes that are coming now and will continue to come in the future.

We're going to take a quick look at the value of a "mission" and how it needs to be used each day to help make the decisions you will need to make and help you focus your energy and resources in the right areas.

Some say having a mission is just part of the "fluffy stuff" you need to do to be in business today. We think a mission is an integral part of defining who you are and should be an active consideration to include in any project, initiative, or strategy you may be considering in the years ahead.

Your Mission Defines Your Purpose

When Jack Welch retired from General Electric in 2001, he began conducting leadership seminars for other business executives to share his insights and techniques in leadership and management. Welch was a big believer for organizations to have an active mission and established values as a method to guide the purpose, direction, and strategies. He assumed all organizations already had these two basic fundamentals in place and he didn't plan on spending much time on them in his seminars. He was shocked to discover that more than 60% of the attending executives did not have a company mission, and 80% had no explicit set of values describing how employees should behave to achieve the mission. His seminars now devote a significantly more time on these topics as a result.

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Do You Have An "Active Mission"?

Congratulations if you already have a mission established for your organization or your project. But, the big question is, Is it an "active mission"?

Do your daily business practices and the decisions you make coincide with the reasons you exist in the first place?

Here are a few questions to help you determine if you have an active or an inactive mission. There is no scoring on this. But, your responses should give you a pretty good indication of where you stand.

- Do you believe in your mission and values?
- Do your employees believe in your mission and values?
- Do you believe your daily business behavior contributes to achieving your mission?
- Do you regularly check your decisions, strategies, and initiatives against your mission?
- Are you achieving your mission?
- If you aren't, what needs to change?
- Is what needs to change, changeable?
- How do I get started?

Active missions provide organizations with an ongoing compass for strategies, initiatives, and decisions. They provide employees, customers, and other stakeholders with a clear sense of purpose and direction.

Check your decisions against your mission regularly. It helps you stay on track, in the right direction, and focusing your resources where they need to be focused.

Defines Who You Are (con't)

We're also big believers in establishing, defining, and "living" the mission of a company or a particular project as a way to guide you in your day-to-day challenges. Decisions are easier to make, priorities are clearer, and goals are achieved more readily when everybody has a clear understanding of purpose and role by having an "active mission" in place.

There are many definitions of a mission and mission statements out there. Quick MBA has a good one;

"While a business must continuously adapt to its competitive environment, there are certain core ideals that remain steady and provide guidance in the process of strategic decision-making. The unchanging ideals form the business vision and are expressed in the company mission statement."

At its very basic level, these core ideals (the mission) describe why you're doing what you're doing and why you exist in the first place.

We continue to be surprised (as Jack Welch was) with the number of organizations who don't have a clear purpose defined, or whose purpose has become obsolete because of lack of use (inactive mission). It's easy for a mission or purpose to become inactive when it is only used or referred to infrequently.

In his book "Winning", Welch states, "in the most common scenario, a company's mission and its values rupture due to the little crisis of daily life in business."

Business decisions are made every day by responding and anticipating to planned and unplanned events. Some of these events may be crisis points that can sometimes conflict with the defined purpose of why you exist (your mission). They may be subtle conflicts, or they can be obvious conflicts. As these little conflicts begin to accumulate, and if the resulting decisions are not regularly checked against the mission, your business (the way you operate) and your purpose become out of sync. Your mission and purpose no longer has relevance and can become obsolete.

The organization becomes rudderless and looks for a new purpose. At the same time priorities begin to conflict and stakeholders (customers, patients, partners, and employees) become confused and begin to question the real purpose of the organization and how it relates to their work. Either the mission needs to change to meet the new rules that have evolved for

the business, or the business operation itself needs to change to more accurately reflect the mission or purpose that has been in place. Either way, it's a difficult and treacherous place find yourself when operating in a dynamic marketplace.

With the changes that will continue to take place in our health care economy especially, it will be more important than ever for organizations to clearly define their purpose, their mission, for themselves and for all those with whom they interact. These missions need to become part of the fabric and make-up of the organization and should be used regularly to guide the decisions you need to make and the initiatives you will want to undertake. We call these "active missions".

We've watched organizations stray from their original purpose and then struggle to regain their footing when forced to address the everyday changes that are happening in our marketplace. They thought they were one thing, and over time (and without even realizing it), they became another. If this happens too late, it may be too late to make a recovery.

In his book, "Authentic Leadership", Bill George says, "authentic leaders know that only by pursuing their missions with passion and commitment can they create sustainable value for their customers, their employees, and their shareholders."

Missions are much more than just the fluffy-stuff. Whether for an organization or for an individual project, a clear and "active mission" provides the guidance we all need to know to reinforce why we're doing what we're doing in the first place.

Think About It:

"If you don't care where you're going it doesn't make a difference which path you take."

The Cheshire Cat; Alice in Wonderland; Louis Carroll

"I quickly learned that team work - all pulling together toward an identifiable common goal- worked far better than rushing headlong over the top' only to discover that no one was behind you."

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