

Put Your Mission and Values To Work - to Produce Alignment

By Leonard J. Brzozowski, Executive Director, Xavier Leadership Center

For many people, a mission and values statement are an academic creation. They may have some mild marketing benefit by posting it on a web site or by framing it in a nice plaque on the wall in the lobby.

Most employees can't recite them, and most do not deeply own them. We spend precious little time discussing them and all their implications. The result, too often, is that they are meaningless pieces of corporate art.

One case in point is Enron. They actually had their four core values: **Integrity, Communication, Respect, and Excellence** literally chiseled in granite in their corporate lobby. The only problem was, sadly, that these bore little resemblance to how people actually behaved. While I'm not certain, I would hazard to guess that Enron did not use these to help screen new applicants, decide on who was promoted, allocate incentive pay, or clarify who would be asked to leave.

Why Does Mission Matter? Ask yourself this question: What % of all decisions made in your organization every day by every employee are not precisely defined in one of your policy and procedures manuals?

Would you guess half? 75%? More? If the ratio is high, ask yourself how your team members are actually making their daily decisions? After all, the decisions they make with every email, phone call, or face-to-face interaction define what your customer service level will be, how your employees are treated, how your suppliers see you, what your quality level will be, and whether you will be over or under budget.

When Mission and Values are deeply understood, these are the things that help us intuitively sense what direction we will "lean" when we make each decision on the job. And, wouldn't it be better if the majority of your employees were "leaning" in the same direction? (Think of your organization as a bobsled.)

We can Learn from Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart is one organization that really gets the idea of using mission and values for alignment. Their corporate web site proclaims the following mission "to help people save money so they can live better", which goes hand-in-hand with their "Always Low Prices" pledge. They believe their customers value frugality, and that they are called to literally improve the lives of their customers!

For Wal-Mart, this means that can make virtually every major decision in their enterprise based on whether or not it helps them better save money. If you go to Bentonville everything says frugal. Their corporate headquarters looks more like my old high school than a typical corporate palace. Suppliers meet in conference rooms with card tables and metal folding chairs. Wal-Mart people stay two-to-a-room when traveling. When they invest, it is on initiatives that help increase efficiency and lower costs (they have been pioneers in things like RFID technology, UPC bar codes, warehouse automation, etc.)

While some have criticized Wal-Mart for some of its HR practices like their staunch antiunion stance, or their heavy reliance on part-time workers. One WM executive describes it this way: "we see those as being consistent with our goal to offer the lowest possible prices. To do so we must operate at the lowest possible cost. We save money with part time workers for whom we do not provide full health benefits. We try to hire young people because they tend to be healthier and incur fewer medical bills. We exist for the purpose of helping our customers save money."

So, while some people see these elements as socially questionable, in the minds of most WM employees, they are absolutely appropriate given what their mission statement means: Always low prices, ALWAYS.

You know there are many other examples of their mission statement visible in their approach to managing their supply chain, working with suppliers, and decorating their stores.

Where Lean Thoughts can become Reality

"Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow."

Ronald. E. Osborn

Richard Kunst

President and CEO

Tel: 519 651 2341 E-mail: rkunst@kunststartofsolutions.com

Web: www.kunststartofsolutions.com

KUNST

Solutions Corp.

Order Management & Scheduling

For those of us who have shopped at a Wal-Mart, we all know we will not be smothered with sales clerks, the store will look Spartan, and the merchandise will be stacked. In Sam Walton's own words, Walmart's strategy is to "Buy it Low, Stack it High, and Sell it Cheap."

On a recent business trip when I lost my luggage – I needed to buy some clothes in a distant city. I found at Wal-Mart I could buy a dress shirt for \$7.50, and slacks for \$13.82. (At a competing Target, I found the roughly comparable items cost \$13.50 and \$19.99 respectively). And so, it appears that Wal-Mart does succeed in delivering on their low price promise. This is vastly more likely when our actions are aligned, top to bottom and side to side in the organization.

A Disney Example. The Walt Disney Company also epitomizes this alignment concept as well. During the Leadership Magic program offered by the Xavier Leadership Center, one of our Disney facilitators described the WDW mission statement as: "to bring happiness to families everywhere". He went on to discuss how this is used at Disney. They train their people to think about the idea of FOCUS vs. PURPOSE. One's focus has to do with their specific job duties and relates to the things we have to do each day to make the business operate. At WDW, they do sell tickets, serve food, operate attractions, transport bags and countless other mundane but vital things.

The purpose is the part that is more about why we are here – and flows directly from the mission. Consider two Disney custodial workers assigned to patrol Main Street in the Magic Kingdom®. They see a young child walking with his grandparents. The child is licking a large ice cream cone, which – you guessed it – falls off the cone and goes splat on the pavement. One of the custodians runs up in efficient fashion, scoops up the fallen blob, sprays water on the pavement and wipes it to insure no slick spot remains. The other worker notices that the child is devastated at having lost his strawberry treat and gently walks him back to the nearest ice cream stand, explains what happened and gets the vendor to dish out a new scoop – this time – in a cup with the cone inverted on top and with 2 Oreo cookies pressed in as ears beside the cone "hat". The child beams happily again, and this moment defines for that family their entire WDW experience as a special one. The first custodian understood the FOCUS of his job, and dispatched the problem efficiently. The second one embodied the sense of PURPOSE – to create happiness.

Understanding Mission and Values helps us make better choices about what to do and how. You never see, for example Disney introduce each year the newest, tallest, fastest, most inverted roller coaster in the world to attract new visitors. That is not for Disney. That is for Kings Island or Cedar Point. Such an investment does not even enter into the Disney consciousness because they know that they are not in the thrill business (as perhaps is Cedar Point), but in the happiness business. Mission helps you make better choices. So, what is your mission statement like? Is it a piece of art, or is it constantly talked about? Is it discussed during all hiring process? Do you look for people who are really excited about it? How hard do you teach and train your team members about not only the words, but what they mean in practice? Do you celebrate people, actions and events that embody it?

Formula for Achieving Alignment.

We urge you to talk about your mission and values. Train your people about their meaning. Invite people who do not share them with passion to leave. Celebrate when you see people achieving good things when living them. Promote and pay based on how well your people live them, and most importantly you must live them yourself . . . openly, publicly, deliberately. . . and especially when it feels hard to do so.

ABOUT The Author

Len Brzozowski is the former CEO of Robotron Corporation. Under his leadership, Robotron was named by Crain's as one of the leading high tech companies in Michigan, and was recognized by the US Chamber of Commerce as one of the 50 most innovative small businesses in the United States. Len teaches entrepreneurship and leadership and is Executive Director of the Xavier Leadership Center.

Richard Kunst

President and CEO

Tel: 519 651 2341 E-mail: rkunst@kunstartofsolutions.com

Web: www.kunstartofsolutions.com