

Mission Statements and Strategic Goals:

Bringing Businesses into Focus

Jonathon Hogge

Extension Area Cereals Educator, University of Idaho Madison County Extension Office

Ashlee Westerhold

Extension Area Economist, University of Idaho Twin Falls Research and Extension Center

Joel Packham

Extension Educator, University of Idaho Cassia County Extension Office

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Introduction

FOCUSING A BUSINESS is a challenging but worthwhile pursuit, one that earns dividends as a business matures. Two ways to manage this project is by developing a mission statement and defining strategic goals.

Mission Statements

Forming a mission statement is an important component of leadership and business development because it clarifies and strengthens an organization's focus. A business vision in written form, a mission statement affirms an organization's goals and priorities, justifying business practices and identifying values. Essentially, a strong mission statement reminds a business owner why s/he opened for business in the first place.

Although motivational, the declaration needn't be wordy or long. In fact, the more concise it is the better, because it will be easier to read, remember, or even memorize.

For example, note the succinct statement that Padlock Ranch, a Wyoming ranching operation, offers: "It is our mission to manage the resources and assets of the ranch for long-term sustainability, while conserving and improving our environment and communities." JBS USA, the world's largest producer of protein, provides a more assertive one, avowing that "Our mission at JBS has remained the same for more than 60 years: to be the best in all that we do, providing superior products and services to our customers and the opportunity of a better future for all our team members." AGCO, a global leader in the design and manufacture of agricultural equipment, is straight and to the point in theirs: "Profitable growth through superior customer service, innovation, quality, and commitment."

Core Values Spotlight

Jim Collins, a business consultant and best-selling author, developed "The Hedgehog Concept" to discuss the nature of business leaders, a concept that aptly informs others about defining core values and their relation to forming mission statements (Collins 2001). He partly based his ideas on a parable written by the ancient Greek poet Archilochus that compares the difference between a fox and hedgehog (and which was made popular by social and political theorist Isiah Berlin's 1953 essay, "The Hedgehog and the Fox").

In the story, a cunning and brilliant fox is so sure that he grasps the complexity of the woodlands around him that he sets his mind on eating a hedgehog. As a result, he spends many hours plotting the perfect attack. Meanwhile, the hedgehog, a simplistic and somewhat drab creature, goes about his business, completely unaware of the fox's ill plans. But when the fox ambushes the hedgehog, the supposedly unremarkable animal surprises him by rolling himself into a spiny, impenetrable ball.

Undeterred, the fox strategizes and restrategizes, ensuring that the futile pattern will merely continue to repeat without success, hence inspiring the bard's famous line, "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." For our purposes in writing a mission statement, the story illustrates the virtue or value of consistency: businesses that devote themselves to creating what they are best at and avoid straying from those strengths will stay in business during rough patches, while businesses that adopt too many competing ideas will lose their focus.

Developing Your Own Mission Statement

How do you construct a mission statement? The process should not be difficult. However, because mission statements provide a foundation for a company's future, first identify the key concepts, particularly your company's core values, for maximum effect. Brainstorming exercises are especially helpful in this regard, for they can help to build usable ideas prior to completing a rough draft.

Core values are central, powerful drivers of any strong mission statement, so let's briefly define and discuss them. Core values are principles that guide an organization's internal conduct as well as its relationship with the external world. Examples include hard work, honesty, integrity, and the desire to provide quality products. They thus form the underlying theme of a mission statement—they come from your passion for business and keep you aligned with who you are—so take care when identifying which ones apply to your business.

Now that you understand the basic idea of a core value, please complete the following exercises.

Step 1

Write down 3–7 core values you think represent your enterprise. Table 1 provides a list of values to help you start brainstorming.

Table 1. Core Value Chart.

Family	Security	Knowledge	
Service	Innovation	Honesty	
Integrity	Stability	Competition	
Confidence	Reliability	Happiness	
Efficiency	Loyalty	Advancement	
Balance	Involvement	Reputation	

Step 2

Use the core values identified in step 1 to start
formulating your mission statement. As a brief
review, a mission statement defines what a business
does for its customers, what it does for its employees,
and what it does for its owners. If your business is
going to reach outside of your local community, you
could include what it does for the nation and world.
But remember, keep it simple!

Step 3

The mission statement will influence decisions and bring focus and direction to your enterprise. Solicit feedback from employees and owners about the statement you have drafted.

Step 4

After making any necessary revisions, print your mission statement on high-quality paper and frame it so that you can see it daily. Put it in a strategic position so all your business colleagues will see it too. Review the statement on a regular basis and discuss with staff whether the business is staying true to its guiding values.

Strategic Goals

Another aid that improves your business' focus involves **strategic goals**. Strategic goals are directives that help business owners realize a strategic plan. You will develop three kinds in this bulletin, all of which reinforce one another: a strategic goal (the larger, overarching objective, like target marketing all dairies), a tactical goal (a short-range planning device that emphasizes current operations and annual goals, like social media marketing), and an operational goal (a specific action, like developing a Facebook platform). The detail work will help you to create a well-constructed strategic plan, a broadly defined outline that sequences the steps you need to take to realize the business vision expressed in your mission statement.

To begin building your strategic plan, first use your mission statement to identify strategic goal(s). State each goal as a fact, then translate it into a tactical or operational activity. That way, your goals can function as only the best-defined ones do, as signposts that clearly reveal a business' best route forward.

When recording your strategic goals, keep in mind that this process not only defines a direction but is self-reinforcing. Consequently, ask yourself the following simple questions: "What do we do?," "Whom do we do it for?," and "How do we excel at it?" For example, if you produce potatoes on irrigated acres, an operational goal could include increasing the use of a cell phone to monitor the center pivot to reduce time spent on its inspection. But a task like this requires so many work hours to set up that a business often ends up devoting lesser time to working on strategic planning and tactical goals, thus harming the realization of both.

Because the concepts are so intertwined, the following basic descriptions may be helpful:

- Strategic planning involves defining the direction and scope of the business in the long run.
- Tactical goals focus on the implementation of the strategic plan.
- Operational goals refer to day-to-day activities.

Additionally, the following template example (Table 2) may be helpful for understanding this process, as well as providing direction as you plan your goals.

Table 2. Template example of the business management process.

Mission Statement:

Our mission is to deliver the finest quality alfalfa hay to our dairies and to ensure maximum performance in our animals, while we strive to remain profitable by enhancing sustainable practices on our land, for our customers, and with our families.

Strategic Goal:

Target marketing to all dairies

Tactical Goal: Social media marketing		Tactical Goal: Face-to-face marketing		Tactical Goal: Develop and maintain consumer confidence	
Operational Goal: Develop and maintain social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter).	Operational Goal: Develop and maintain a web page	Operational Goal: Visit all dairies	Operational Goal: Share alfalfa-quality test sheets	Operational Goal: Invite current and potential customers to a field-day lunch	Operational Goal: Provide current operations and capacity statistics

Once you have completed writing your strategic goals, schedule time to review them with your team. If your team has proven strong and capable, go over your goals frequently with them. Goals are designed to create focus, so the more you reinforce the former the better for your business. At the very least, review the strategic goals often enough so that team members realize their importance, but not to the degree that it interferes with your team's ability to execute them.

Summary

Mission statements and strategic goals channel the energy of a business in a beneficial direction. Without them, an owner may struggle to implement a strategic plan. Indeed, without spending time thinking about her/his visions for the future and what s/he needs to do to achieve them, a business owner will likely fail to meet most if not all goals set. Putting thoughts in the form of a mission statement and strategic goals, however, can keep this from happening. They are highly useful tools that help to clarify decisions that affect a business enterprise over both the short and long term.

Further Reading

Collins, Jim. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... And Others Don't.* New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

