**SOCIAL JUSTICE 105 CREATING YOUR MISSION STATEMENT & STRATEGY**

**FROM THE DESK OF THE DEAN**

**MISSION STATEMENT & MORE**

**TOPIC 1**

**What is a Mission Statement?**

A mission statement is a simple statement that explains your non-profit’s goals. It’s a summary of what your non-profit does for its participants, employees, and board members. It explains how you do what you do. And, it focuses on why your non-profit does what it does. Some of the best mission statements also extend themselves to include fourth and fifth dimensions: what the non-profit does for its community, and for the world.

Developing your non-profit’s first mission statement, or writing a new or revised one, is your opportunity to define the company’s goals, ethics, culture, and norms for decision-making. The daily routine of non-profit gets in the way sometimes, and a quick refresh with the mission statement helps you take a step back and remember what’s most important: the organization has a purpose.

You *should* write a mission statement if you want to add clarity to your non-profit goals and you want to get your employees, board members, and participants to understand what your organization is all about.

If you already have a mission statement and you want to see if it’s actually adding value to your organization, try to have it pass this simple test by asking your employees, board members, and participants to recite their knowledge of your mission.

If you have a mission statement in your non-profit, test it by asking yourself, honestly, whether your competitors could use exactly the same statement.

Does it distinguish you from all other non-profits? If you gave an employee or participant a blind screening test, asking her to read your mission statement and four others without identifying which is which, would she be able to tell which mission statement was yours?

**Start with a market-defining story**

You don’t have to actually write the story—it’s definitely not included in the mission statement—but do think it through because it will guide how you write your mission statement:

Imagine a real person making the actual decision to participate in your non-profit. Use your imagination to see why she wants it, how she finds you, and what participating with you does for her. The more concrete the story, the better. **And keep that in mind for the actual mission statement wording: “The more concrete, the better.”**

A really good market-defining story explains the need, or the want, or—if you like jargon—the so-called “why to buy.” It defines the target group or participant. And it defines how your non-profit is different from most others, or even unique. It simplifies thinking about what a non-profit isn’t, what it doesn’t do.

This isn’t literally part of the mission statement. Rather, it’s an important thing to have in your head while you write the mission statement. It’s in the background, between the words. If you’re having trouble getting started, make a quick list of what your non-profit does and doesn’t do.

**Define what your business does for its participants**

**Start your mission statement with the good you do.** Use your market-defining story to suss out whatever it is that makes your business special for your target customer.

Don’t undervalue your non-profit: You don’t have to cure cancer or stop global climate change to be doing good. An example - Offering trustworthy auto repair, for example, narrowed down to your specialty in your neighborhood with your unique policies, is doing something good. So is offering excellent slow food in your neighborhood, with emphasis on organic and local, at a price premium.

This *is* a part of your mission statement, and a crucial part—write it down.

If your non-profit is good for the world, incorporate that here too. But claims about being good for the world need to be meaningful, and distinguishable from all the other non-profits. Add the words “clean” or “green” if that’s really true and you keep to it rigorously. Don’t just say it, especially if it isn’t important or always true.

For example, Apple Computer’s 2020 mission statement is:

*“Apple revolutionized personal technology with the introduction of the Macintosh in 1984. Today, Apple leads the world in innovation with iPhone, iPad, Mac, Apple Watch, and Apple TV. Apple’s four software platforms—iOS, macOS, watchOS, and tvOS—provide seamless experiences across all Apple devices and empower people with breakthrough services including the App Store, Apple Music, Apple Pay, and iCloud. Apple’s more than 100,000 employees are dedicated to making the best products on earth, and to leaving the world better than we found it..”*

That one obviously passes the test of defining the company with flying colors. Nobody could mistake that mission with generic hype. And it’s an interesting change from the early mission as defined by founder Steve Jobs:

*“To make a contribution to the world by making tools for the mind that advance humankind.”*

Ikea, on the other hand, starts its mission statement with something that could be any company anywhere. “Our vision is to create a better everyday life for the [sic] many people.” To its credit, it goes on to define a “rest of the mission” that could only be IKEA:

*“We make this possible by offering a wide range of well-designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them.”*

And note, in this mission statement, how Sweetgreen incorporates a world vision into a product-oriented mission statement:

*“Founded in 2007, Sweetgreen is a destination for delicious food that’s both healthy for you and aligned with your values. We source local and organic ingredients from farmers we know and partners we trust, supporting our communities, and creating meaningful relationships with those around us. We exist to create experiences where passion and purpose come together.”*

**Define what your business does for its employees**

Good non-profits are good for their employees too or they don’t last. Keeping employees is better for the bottom line than turnover. Non-profits culture matters. Rewarding and motivating people matters. A mission statement can define what your business offers its employees.

My recommendation is that you don’t simply *assert* how the non-profit is good for employees—you define it here and then forever after make it true.

Qualities like fairness, diversity, respect for ideas and creativity, training, tools, empowerment, and the like, actually really matter. However, since every non-profit in existence at least *says* that it prioritizes those things, strive for a differentiator and a way to make the general goals feel more concrete and specific.

With this part of the mission statement, there’s a built-in dilemma. On the one hand, it’s good for everybody involved to use the mission statement to establish what you want for employees in your non-profit. On the other hand, it’s hard to do that without falling into the trap of saying what every other non-profit says.

Stating that you value fair compensation, room to grow, training, a healthy, creative work environment, and respect for diversity is probably a good idea, even if that part of your mission statement isn’t unique. That’s because the mission statement can serve as a reminder—for board members, management, front-line employees, and participants—and as a lever for self-enforcement.

If you have a special view on your relationship with employees, write it into the mission statement. If your non-profit is friendly to families, or to remote virtual workplaces, put that into your mission.

And this is rare in mission statements. The vast majority are focused on messaging for potential participants. My recommendation here is not the norm. I include it because it’s good practice, even though not common.

When I consulted for Apple, for example, that business differentiated its goals of training and empowering employees by making a point of bringing in very high-quality educators and presenters to help employees’ business expertise grow. That was part of the culture and, to my mind, part of the mission; but it wasn’t part of the mission statement. It could have been.

American Express, however, includes the team in its mission:

*“We have a mission to be the world’s most respected service brand. To do this, we have established a culture that supports our team members, so they can provide exceptional service to our customers.”*

**Add what the non-profit does for its Board Members or Advisory**

In business school, they teach that the mission of management is to enhance the value of the stock. And shares of stock are ownership. Some would say that it goes without saying that a business exists to enhance the financial position of its owners, and maybe it does. However, only a small subset of all businesses are about the business buzzwords of “share value” and “return on investment.” In a non-profit there is not a financial exit like there is in a business.

In the early years of my business, I wanted peace of mind about cash flow more than I wanted growth, and I wanted growth more than I wanted profits. So I wrote that into my mission statement. And at one point I realized I was also building a business that was a place where I was happy to be working, with people I wanted to work with; so I wrote that into my mission statement, too.

However, this element too, as with the suggestion about including employees, is unusual. Few mission statements do it. That’s understandable, since most mission statements are outward-facing only, aimed at customers and nobody else.

Still, some of the best mission statements incorporate a much broader sense of mission that includes, or at least implies, the mission of ownership. Being a non-profit is all about those engaged feeling like Owners.

Warby Parker, an eyewear company, does a great job at voicing a higher mission that includes customers, employees, and owners.

*“Warby Parker was founded with a rebellious spirit and a lofty objective: to offer designer eyewear at a revolutionary price while leading the way for socially-conscious business.”*

**Discuss, digest, cut, polish, review, revise**

Whatever you wrote for points two through four above, go back and cut down the wordiness.

Good mission statements serve multiple functions, define objectives, and live for a long time. So, edit. This step is worth it.

Start by considering developing a full mission statement for internal use and using a participant-facing subset for general publication. That’s common. Many non-profits have segmented mission statements, with sections set aside and categorized by type or goal. Use bullet points or sections if that works for you. Part of the reason people confuse mission with mantra and vision is that many businesses use them together, and many others also redefine them to fit their context. So what a non-profit does for participants is often called vision, despite the formal definition.

Remember, **form follows function, in mission statements, as in all business writing.** Make it work for your business. Or don’t do it at all. If you want to call it a vision, and that works for employees and participants, then do that.

As you edit, keep a sharp eye out for the buzzwords and hype that everybody claims. Cut as much as you can that doesn’t apply specifically to your business, except for the occasional special elements that—unique or not—can serve as long-term rules and reminders. Unique itself, the word, means literally, the only one in the world. Use it sparingly. Phrases such as “being the best possible,” “world-class,” and “great customer service” mean little because everybody uses them. Having great follow up is way harder than writing that into a mission statement.

Read other non-profits’ mission statements, but write a statement that is about you and not some other company. Make sure you actually believe in what you’re writing—your participants and your employees will soon spot a lie.

Then, listen. Show drafts to others ask their opinions and really listen. Don’t argue, don’t convince them, just listen. And then edit again.

And, for the rest of your non-profit’s life, review and revise it as needed. As with everything in a business plan, your mission statement should never get written in stone, and, much less, stashed in a drawer. Use it or lose it. Review and revise as necessary, because change is constant.

TOPIC 1

**DISCUSSION QUESTION 1**

Please answer these questions thoroughly

What do we do?

How do we do it?

Whom do we do it for?

What value do we bring?

**DISCUSSION QUESTION 2**

Please create a market-defining story.

Define what your business does for its participants.

**Define what your business does for its employees**

Add what the non-profit does for its Board Members or Advisory

**DISCUSSION QUESTION 3 with the Dean**

**PLEASE SET UP A PHONE CALL OR ZOOM CALL WITH THE DEAN FOR 15-30 MINUTES.**