
Developing a Mission Statement

A Case Study

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A core component of an organization's strategy is a clear and concise mission statement. While the mission is a core component of strategy, we strongly advise against writing a mission statement as the first, second or even third activity in a strategy planning session.

If you have been through the typical mission writing exercise, you probably understand the reason behind this recommendation. Planning teams typically spend hours and often days haggling over the exact wording for the mission. And while the words are important, there could be significant benefit gained from using a process that helps the planning team move quicker to consensus.

Our Mission Development Process

In analyzing the challenge that groups have in developing mission statements, we have concluded that a key source of the difficulty is that the group is trying to answer Who are we?, What do we want to be? and How do we put this in a small pithy sentence? – all at the same time!

What can make developing a mission statement so frustrating is that you can have all three discussions occurring simultaneously because conclusions have not been reached on the three elements separately. For example, while one person is arguing over changing a word, another is arguing over a concept that appears to be missing, while a third is insisting that the mission should be aspirational.

Our process for creating mission statements is to answer the following questions, in this order:

1. Where are we now and what key trends will impact our success in the future? (SWOT analysis and/or positioning against trends)
2. What might success look like 10 years in the future? (visioning)
3. Given this description of success, what are the broad goals for long-term sustained success? (goal statements)
4. Given these goals, what does this imply that our mission is? (mission statement)

To answer question 4, we have the entire group answer the following:

What do we do? For whom do we do it? What is the benefit?



“A mission is a statement of the overall purpose of an organization. Simply put, the mission should state what you do, for whom you do it, and the benefit.”

Michael Wilkinson, Author
The Secrets of Facilitation

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The Case Study

Recently, we were working with the Diversity Leadership Forum. The DLF is a trade association of diversity professionals. While some of their members work inside organizations, others are external trainers and consultants. The organization convenes an annual conference of diversity professionals and has established a competency model for diversity. They desired to develop a strategic plan because they felt they had not clearly defined their niche or how they would go about gaining the commitment of others to join them.

Step 1. Where are we now?

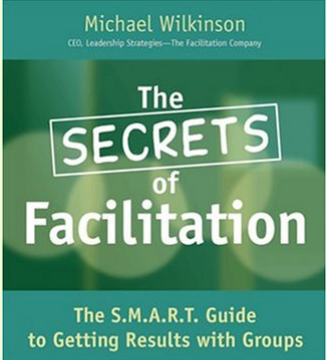
The team identified several strengths, areas for improvement and potential strategies to consider. Among them:

- ❑ Our standard, ethics and information are good
- ❑ Positive recognition that we are re-developing field concerning competencies and standards and educating members
- ❑ Lack of clarity about who the forum is for
- ❑ A lot of people don't seem to know what we offer or haven't used what we offer
- ❑ There's a need for on-going communication and education
- ❑ Aligning diversity ideas with the business and how it operates (alignment), going beyond the fluff to meet tangible mission, critical outcomes could be helpful
- ❑ Consider seeking endorsements from peer organizations for the competency model, etc. (include leaders in various approaches)
- ❑ Consider producing definitive paper on how to develop and execute cultural competence
- ❑ Consider preparing practitioners to deal with changed and changing demographic trends
- ❑ Consider establish national database of practitioners

Step 2. Where do we want to be?

In response to a visioning exercise which guided the participants to define success 10 years out, 30+ vision elements were identified, such as the following:

- ❑ A source for diversity content
- ❑ Premier resource for practitioners developments
- ❑ Competencies nationally recognized, elevate field, essential
- ❑ Move diversity to recognized discipline
- ❑ Remove structural inequalities in management, domestic and international
- ❑ Advance inclusion around the world
- ❑ Great financial endowment



Michael Wilkinson
CEO, Leadership Strategies—The Facilitation Company

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Step 3. What are the broad goals for long-term sustained success?

Using the vision elements as a starting point, the participants developed five broad goals for the organization.

A. Information Source	Provide leading edge, intellectual collateral about diversity that crosses industries and approaches and is easily accessible for people of different backgrounds and abilities.
B. Practitioner Development	Provide effective, safe, continuous learning and renewal opportunities for diversity practitioners at all levels and across approaches.
C. Societal Recognition	Evaluate and promote the field of diversity as a recognized discipline.
D. Impact	Advocate and communicate the role diversity plays in creating valuable, life changing outcomes.
E. Organization	Maintain sufficient organizational and financial resources to support the mission.

Step 4. What is our mission?

After a discussion of the purpose of a mission statement and a review of several relatively strong and relatively weak mission statements, the participants were asked to answer the three critical mission questions for DLF. One of the participants responded to the three questions as follows and the facilitator recorded the answers on a flip chart for all to see.

- ❑ What do we do? - **Provide a forum for growth and development**
- ❑ For whom do we do it? - **Diversity professional**
- ❑ What's the benefit? - **Recognition and advancement of the field of diversity**

Suddenly, one of the participants yelled out, "That's it! That's our mission! That's it right there!" After less than 10 minutes of discussion, the rest of the participants readily agreed.

Our Mission
We provide a forum for the growth and development of diversity practitioners and for the recognition and advancement of the field of diversity.

With the completion of steps 1-3 in the process, this team reached consensus on their mission statement in under 20 minutes. As the weight-loss ads say, "These results aren't typical...your results might vary." However, it is not unusual for a group using this process to reach consensus in 60-90 minutes.

You can learn more about strategic planning techniques like these through our on-line strategy course, Springboard Online! Or contact one of our client relationship managers to have one of our facilitators work with you.

Michael Wilkinson is the Managing Director of Leadership Strategies – The Facilitation Company and author of *The Secrets of Facilitation*. He is a *Certified Master Facilitator* and a much sought after strategic planning facilitator, trainer and speaker. For additional information on meeting facilitation services, training classes or other services, contact Leadership Strategies at the website or telephone number below.



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