

The Best Companies have the Best Mission Statements

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In the April 15, 2007 article I wrote about a client who hired a consulting firm to create a program to bring about a cultural shift in the way their business operates. Although the program was designed with the best intentions, it was ill-received by its production workers. One of the reasons for the disconnection between the program and the workers was that the company's mission statement (to provide customers with products to improve their health and quality of life) was not reinforced as the centerpiece of the program. Therefore the program was viewed as another attempt to make everyone work harder and was essentially rejected by the rank-and-file. Had the company used its mission statement as the centerpiece of the program, it could have been a rallying cry for its workers and would have changed the corporate culture.

Some of the best companies in the world have made judicious use of their mission statements to create a corporate culture that was readily accepted by its workers as well as its clients, suppliers and investors. For example, listed below are a few outstanding mission statements from outstanding companies (www.businessplans.org/Mission.html):

3M: "To solve unsolved problems innovatively"

Mary Kay Cosmetics: "To give unlimited opportunity to women"

Merck: "To preserve and improve human life"

Wal-Mart: "To give ordinary folk the chance to buy the same thing as rich people"

Walt Disney: "To make people happy"

In addition, the mission statements of the top five 2007 *Fortune* 100 companies are:

Google: "Never settle for the best"

Genentech "To cultivate as diverse a supplier pool as possible in order to maximize the quality and talent available to Genentech"

Wegmans Food Markets "Helping You Make Great Meals Easy"

Container Store "Helping people simplify their lives"

Whole Foods Market "To sell the highest quality products that also offer high value for our customers"

These statements are similar in that they are simple, clear, focused, intense and can be readily explained and expected from everyone in the organization. Each statement is in reality a process that led each company to be the best in its field. How could this be?

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It started with a vision. The founder or CEO had a vision of the company and created a process, or mission, to deliver it to everyone in the company. The mission was so clear that it could be readily embraced and used as a guide for everyone within the organization to do the right thing and make the right decisions. Each mission is results oriented and requires no elaborate presentations or teams of consultants to develop it. What it does require, however, is the discipline and determination to implement it. Here is what separates the great companies from the best companies. Only the best have a process to implement the mission and to continuously reinforce it so it is always predominant. What's the process?

1. The company leaders fully embrace the mission
2. The company leaders expect everyone in the company to fully embrace the mission
3. The company leaders implement the mission
4. The company leaders continuously reinforce the mission
5. The company leaders maintain constant contact with their employees
6. The company leaders listen to their employees
7. The company leaders recognize their best employees
8. The company leaders release employees who do not embrace the mission
9. The company leaders may need someone to help implement the mission
10. The employees fully embrace the mission

At first glance it appears as though the bulk of the process falls squarely upon the leaders' shoulders, however the employees are equally responsible for carrying out their fair share of the work. Essentially the best companies are those that have the best mission statements and continuously reinforce them. Elaborate programs that cost millions are not necessary, nor are scores of consultants or reams of reports, proficiency studies and efficiency studies. Conversely, the mission statement may need to be rewritten to reflect the company's vision and it might have to be rewritten by an experienced person who could not only rewrite it but can also implement it and reinforce it. The bottom line is if the leaders are serious about being the best they will inculcate the mission throughout the organization and will lead the organization by setting the right example.

Implementing the mission statement really is a simple process and can be applied to any company, no matter what its size. The best companies really do have the best mission statements and continuously reinforce them throughout the organization and beyond. As the best company in their area, they are able to attract and retain the best employees, clients, suppliers and investors.