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# Vision and Mission Statements -- a Roadmap of Where You Want to Go and How to Get There

Have you ever been involved in an organization or business that never seems to accomplish very much? Regardless of how hard you work, you just go in circles. The problem may be that you have not decided where you want to go and have not created a roadmap of how to get there. From the perspective of an organization, the problem may be that you are not focusing on what you want to achieve and how you will achieve it. Below are a series of steps or statements of how to give your organization direction.

The first is a statement of vision. It provides a destination for the organization. Next is a statement of mission. This is a guiding light of how to get to the destination. These are critical statements for the organization and the individuals who run the organization.

- **Vision** – Big picture of what you want to achieve.
- **Mission** – General statement of how you will achieve the vision.

A companion statement often created with the vision and mission is a statement of core values.

- **Core Values** – How you will behave during the process.

Once you have identified what your organization wants to achieve (vision) and generally how the vision will be achieved (mission), the next step is to develop a series of statements specifying how the mission will be utilized to achieve the vision:

- **Strategies** – Strategies are one or more ways to use the mission statement in order to achieve the vision statement. Although an organization will have just one vision statement and one mission statement, it may have several strategies.

- **Goals** – These are general statements of what needs to be accomplished to implement a strategy.
- **Objectives** – Objectives provide specific milestones with a specific timeline for achieving a goal.
- **Action Plans** – These are specific implementation plans of how you will achieve an objective.

A more in-depth discussion of these statements is presented below. Statements for an example business are provided for clarification.

**Vision Statement** – A mental picture of what you want to accomplish or achieve. For example, your vision may be a successful winery business or an economically active community.

Vision of an Example Business –  
*A successful family dairy business.*

**Mission Statement** – A general statement of how the vision will be achieved. The mission statement is an action statement that usually begins with the word “to”.

Mission of an Example Business –  
*To provide unique and high quality dairy products to local consumers.*

**Core Values** – Core values define the organization in terms of the principles and values the leaders will follow in carrying out the activities of the organization.

Core Values of the Example Business:

- *Focus on new and innovative business ideas*
- *Practice high ethical standards.*
- *Respect and protect the environment.*
- *Meet the changing needs and desires of clients and consumers.*

Statements of vision and mission are important so that everyone involved in the organization, including outside stakeholders, understand what the organization will accomplish and how it will be accomplished. In essence this means “keeping everyone on the same page” so they are all “pulling in the same direction.”

There is a close relationship between the vision and mission. As the vision statement is a static mental picture of what you want to achieve, the mission statement is a dynamic process of how the vision will be accomplished. To create successful statements, you should keep the following concepts in mind.

**Simple** – The vision and mission guide the everyday activities of every person involved in the business. Statements of vision and mission should be simple, concise and easy to remember. Use just enough words to capture the essence. The statements need to capture the very essence of what your organization or business will achieve and how it will be achieved. So statements of vision and mission should be a single thought that can easily be carried in the mind. This makes it easy for everyone in the organization to focus on them. To test the effectiveness of your statements, ask the leaders, managers and employees to tell you the vision and mission of their organization. If they cannot instantaneously tell you both the vision and mission, the statements are of little use.

But that doesn’t mean it will be easy to create the statements. It may require several drafts. Most statements are too long. People tend to add additional information and qualifications to the statements. Usually the additional information just confuses the reader and clouds the essence of the statement. Each successive draft of the vision and mission should be to simplify and clarify by using as few words as possible.

**Fluid Process** – The statements are not “cast in stone.” They can be updated and modified if the organization changes its focus. It is often good to write the statements, use them for a period of time,

and then revisit them a few months or a year later if needed. It may be easier to sharpen the focus of the statement at that time. Remember, the reason you are writing the statements is to clarify what you are doing.

**Unique and Complex Organizations** – It is usually more important to write statements for non-traditional organization where the purpose of the organization is unique. The same is true for complex organizations where it may be difficult to sift down to the essence of the existence of the organization.

### Strategies, Goals, Objectives and Action Plans

Once you have created statements of vision and mission, and possibly core values, you can then develop the strategies, goals, objectives and action plans needed to activate your mission and achieve your vision.

**Strategies** – A strategy is a statement of how you are going to achieve something. More specifically, a strategy is a unique approach of how you will use your mission to achieve your vision. Strategies are critical to the success of an organization because this is where you begin outlining a plan for doing something. The more unique the organization, the more creative and innovative you need to be in crafting your strategies.

**Goals** – A goal is a general statement of what you want to achieve. More specifically, a goal is a milestone(s) in the process of implementing a strategy. Examples of business goals are:

- *Increase profit margin*
- *Increase efficiency*
- *Capture a bigger market share*
- *Provide better customer service*
- *Improve employee training*
- *Reduce carbon emissions*

Be sure the goals are focused on the important aspects of implementing the strategy. Be careful not to set too many goals or you may run the risk

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of losing focus. Also, design your goals so that they don't contradict and interfere with each other. A goal should meet the following criteria:

- *Understandable*: Is it stated simply and easy to understand?
- *Suitable*: Does it assist in implementing a strategy of how the mission will achieve the vision?
- *Acceptable*: Does it fit with the values of the organization and its members/employees?
- *Flexible*: Can it be adapted and changed as needed?

**Objectives** – An objective turns a goal's general statement of what is to be accomplished into a specific, quantifiable, time-sensitive statement of what is going to be achieved and when it will be achieved. Examples of business objectives are:

- *Earn at least a 20% after-tax rate of return on our investment during the next fiscal year*
- *Increase market share by 10% over the next three years.*
- *Lower operating costs by 15% over the next two years through improvement in the efficiency of the manufacturing process.*
- *Reduce the call-back time of customer inquiries and questions to no more than four hours.*

Objectives should meet the following criteria:

- *Measurable*: What specifically will be achieved and when will it be achieved?
- *Suitable*: Does it fit as a measurement for achieving the goal?
- *Feasible*: Is it possible to achieve?
- *Commitment*: Are people committed to achieving the objective?
- *Ownership*: Are the people responsible for achieving the objective included in the objective-setting process?

**Action Plans** – Action plans are statements of specific actions or activities that will be used to achieve a goal within the constraints of the objective.

Examples of action plans within the context of goals and objectives are:

Goal	Objective	Action Plan
Increase Profit Margin	Reduce operating costs by 10% in 18 months	Finance department will conduct an in-depth analysis of identifying low cost suppliers.
Improve Employee Skills	Conduct a training program in the next 12 months to improve employee skills.	A special committee will be formed to select and hire a professional trainer to conduct the training.
Increase Profit Margin	Increase sales volume by 20% in 12 months.	Marketing department will create and implement a plan to increase sales in regions 3 and 5.

Action plans may be simple statements or full blown and detailed [business plans](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/vdstart.html#plans), [www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/vdstart.html#plans](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/vdstart.html#plans), where goals and objectives are also included. Action plans may also be used to implement an entire strategy (called [strategic planning](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wdothet.html#strategic), [www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wdothet.html#strategic](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wdothet.html#strategic)).

### Putting it All Together

To help you understand the relationship between each of these statements, examples of strategies, goals, objectives and action plans are shown for a business organization designed to improve the rural economy through developing rural businesses. Remember, the vision is what you want to accomplish. Mission is a general statement of how you will achieve your vision. Strategies are a series of ways of using the mission to achieve the vision. Goals are statements of what needs to be accomplished to implement the strategy. Objectives are specific actions and timelines for achieving the goal. Action plans are specific actions that need to be taken for reaching the milestones within the timeline of the objectives.

**Vision:** A vibrant rural economy driven by new and growing businesses.

**Mission:** To create new businesses and help existing businesses expand.

**Strategy:** Use local leaders with business development skills.

**Goal:** Recruit local leaders interested and experienced in business creation.

**Objective:** Create a list of 20 individuals by February 1.

**Action Plan:** Form a committee to recruit local leaders. Identify 40 leaders in the area. List their qualifications. Contact them individually with the expectation that half of them will participate.

**Vision:** A vibrant rural economy driven by new and growing businesses.

**Mission:** To create new businesses and help existing businesses expand.

**Strategy:** Use consultants to supplement the skills of local leaders in creating businesses.

**Goal:** Recruit experienced and reliable consultants.

**Objective:** Identify and retain legal, accounting and industry consultants by March 1.

**Action Plan:** Create a committee from the membership (recruited above) to talk to Prairie Ethanol, Peterson Organics and Valley Bio-Diesel about who their consultants are, select a small group to interview and hire an attorney, an accountant and an industry consultant.

**Vision:** A vibrant rural economy driven by new and growing businesses.

**Mission:** To create new businesses and help existing businesses expand.

**Strategy:** Create successful businesses by focusing on current market opportunities.

**Goal:** Identify and analyze market opportunities for possible business ventures.

**Objective:** Identify three potential market opportunities by June 1.

**Action Plan:** Select and contract with an industry consultant to conduct an industry scan to identify market opportunities.

**Vision:** A vibrant rural economy driven by new and growing businesses.

**Mission:** To create new businesses and help existing businesses expand.

**Strategy:** Provide financial support for the businesses from investments by individual members.

**Goal:** Build a membership base.

**Objective:** Have 500 members by August 1.

**Action Plan:** The membership committee will conduct 10 membership meetings at specified locations on the following dates in June and July.

## Conclusions

Creating the statements described above may seem like a lot of busy work. But these statements will help you focus on the important aspects of your organization or business. If done properly, they can save money and time and increase the odds that your organization or business venture will be successful.

Think of these statements as living documents that may change as the needs of the organization or business change. Too often these statements are treated as “iconic relics” to be stored away in a safe place. But, if you don’t use them, you have wasted your time.

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