

The Mission Statement Revisited

You are not experiencing déjà vu. We've been here before. We're revisiting it because no matter how much Tudog encourages our clients to formulate a mission statement it is seen as a formality, one of those fruitless exercises consultants like to bring their clients through...maybe even just to generate fees. Well folks, it's not. The mission statement is your purpose and it gives your company a sense of meaning. Formulating a mission statement is part of the process a company goes through for self-discovery. It is necessary to excel. In order to excel you need to know what you are aiming to excel at.

This month's article is not only going to preach the importance of a mission statement, it's also going to provide some practical steps to be taken in the formulation process. This way, perhaps, the creation of the statement won't seem like so much business school nonsense, and more like what it is – a process that forces you to think constructively, critically, and strategically about your business.

There are 4 steps Tudog believes are critical to the establishment of a purposeful mission statement. They are:

1. Discover Your Values

Discovering your values is not as easy as it seems. Typically we all believe that we have an excellent understanding of our core values. Yet, when we need to convey those values within the context of our business we stumble a bit because transferring our personal values to a context is complicated and compromising. Still, this beginning step is crucial because it is a statement of who you are and what you believe in, and without it your company will be devoid of direction. The personality and moral code of a business leader determines the character and vision of the company he or she leads. Moreover, your precise declaration of your values will establish clear guidelines for decision making throughout the company, making it more effective and responsive to market events.

By way of example, some values that you may want to embrace include integrity, commitment to excellence, quality, innovativeness, employee recognition and compensation, customer service, and community involvement.

Beginning the mission statement process by discovering your values serves to create the character and vision of the company. This is beginning to look like a worthy process, isn't it?

2. Begin Composing Your Statement

Once you have gone through the soul searching, values balancing act of discovery you can begin to compose your mission statement. The statement itself needs to be comprised of four essential elements; (1) the values you embrace, (2) the ambitions you aspire to (what you foresee the company becoming), (3) the benefit you will deliver, and (4) how you will fulfill your mission.

Let's take a look at Tudog's mission statement and review why we composed it as we did:

“To assist U.S. and non-U.S. based companies gain long-term strategic and competitive advantage in the U.S. market through rigorous analysis, applied lessons, compelling business models, dedicated implementation, and creative thinking”.

- Do we express the values we embrace? We constructed the first sentence to begin with the words *“to assist”*, which we intended to demonstrate our core value, which is to improve the status quo of our clients. We also included *“gain long-term strategic and competitive advantage”* as an indication of what we view as the business values we embrace.
- Do we communicate the ambitions we aspire to? Perhaps. We certainly communicate the vision we aspire for our clients, but no, we do not include something along the lines of *“to be the leading business advisory firm...”* Our exclusion is a technical violation of the rules we suggesting to you, but not a violation of the spirit. We permit it because we are a service oriented company and need a mission statement that embraces the objectives of our clients. In doing so, we believe, we express our own ambition.
- Do we express the benefit we deliver? We believe we are extremely effective on this point when we write, *“To assist U.S. and non-U.S. based companies gain long-term strategic and competitive advantage in the U.S. market”* We are quite clear in our target market, our area of operations and the benefit we deliver.
- Do we communicate how we fulfill our mission? Again, we would submit that we do so extremely effectively when we include, *“through rigorous analysis, applied lessons, compelling business models, dedicated implementation, and creative thinking”*.

The Tudog mission statement demonstrates the outcome of a process of strategic thinking that forced us to identify the character, goals, methods and proposition of our company. Had we declined to write the mission statement, or go through the process, we would have neglected to consider some of the crucial elements the process of composition encouraged us to confront. This is the essence of the mission statement process. Pretty worthy, isn't it?

3. Work as a Team

The idea of one individual crafting the mission statement negates the overall purpose of the statement – the presence of a unifying definition of what the company is and strives to be. By bringing your managers and employees into the process of construction you are demonstrating through your actions how important you view the statement to be, and you are also allowing them the opportunity to contribute and claim ownership to the statement. The more people you include the more loyalty you will later experience.

The process doesn't seem as overwhelming as you thought, does it?

4. State Your Purpose

In a narrow perspective, the purpose of your company is to generate revenue from which profits can be derived. On a broader level the reason you entered into the business you are in, as opposed to another profit generating opportunity, is because you have a greater goal, a more ambitious vision, and even, perhaps, a notion that you can bring some benefit to people or an industry that needs you. By stating your purpose you are communicating the vision of the company and its reason for being.

The process seems more beneficial than you realized, doesn't it?

The fact is that companies with mission statements perform better than those without. The reason is because they took the time not to write down some boilerplate words, but rather to engage in a process, to enter into a strategic exploratory process, that produced clarity and direction for the company.

Now go write your mission statement.