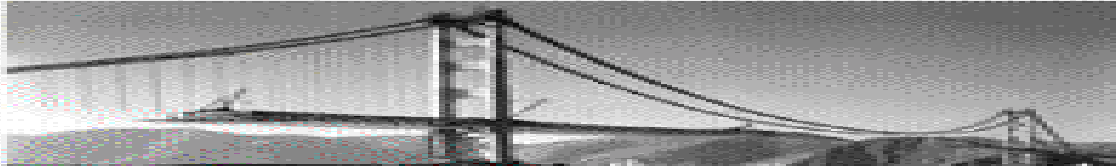


Building Bridges



Volume 1, No. 3

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VISION, MISSION & VALUE STATEMENTS The Three Legs To The Planning Stool

THIS ISSUE

This is the third of a series of bulletins addressing Transitions In Leadership's approach to the Long-Range Visioning and Strategic Planning process. The first issue presented a model for planning. The last issue reviewed the need for information gathering. *(Contact us if you would like additional copies of the first two issues.)*

The focus of this issue is the first steps in the Strategic Thinking & Planning Phase: the development of the Vision, Mission and Values Statements. The creation of these three statements establishes the foundation for the overall long-range vision and strategic plan.

THE THREE LEGS TO THE PLANNING STOOL

Consider the comparison of the Vision, Mission, and Value Statements to a three-legged milk stool. The milk stool is only as good as the strength and balance of its three legs. If one of those legs is weak, the stool may break under the weight of the milkmaid. If one leg is not the same length as the other two, the stool will be unstable. Well-constructed and balanced legs ensure a strong and stable foundation for the stool.

The Vision, Mission, and Value Statements are like the three legs of a stool. They must be well-constructed and in balance. If an organization does not have all three statements as part of its strategic repertoire, it risks having a weak, unstable plan.

The presence of the three statements guides the rest of the planning process. In order to develop these three statements, the Planning Committee (PC) must commit to a decision-making process based on open dialogue and group consensus.

The first thing the PC must do is review and revise, if necessary, existing statements and/or create new statements. The development of the three statements must be a group process. Both board and staff must agree to the three statements. Without full commitment from both groups, the plan will be flawed and the future direction of the organization unsure.

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What Is The Vision For Your Organization?

It was just thirty-seven years ago when Martin Luther King, Jr. stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., and proclaimed his dream for the future. John F. Kennedy set forth his aspirations for America through his New Frontier. During the next few months, we will be hearing a lot about what others think the future will be like with the next President.

The test of a leader is the ability to clearly communicate his/her vision of the future and motivate others to share that vision and work toward it. Every agency leader has the responsibility to motivate others to commit to the same vision.

A vision is a statement that defines the long-range direction of where an organization is heading. The statement should be bold, challenging, and clearly stated. Those who will work to make it a reality should embrace it and be committed to it.

A vision is not a mission. It is different from a mission. The vision projects what the organization will be like in the future. The mission defines what the organization wants to accomplish now.

Having a dream for the future requires one to think beyond today's reality and blend creative thinking, boldness, idealism, entrepreneurial leadership, and strategic thinking.

Burt Nanus, a noted author on leadership, wrote in his book "Visionary Leadership" (1992),

"A vision is only an idea or an image of a more desirable future for the organization, but the right vision is an idea so energizing that it in effect jump-starts the future by calling forth the skills, talents, and resources to make it happen."

He continues, "Vision plays an important role not only in the start-up phase of an organization but throughout the organization's entire life cycle. Vision is a signpost pointing the way for all who need to understand what the

organization is and where it intends to go. Sooner or later, the time will come when an organization needs redirection or perhaps a complete transformation, and then the first step should always be a new vision, a wake-up call to everyone involved with the organization that fundamental change is needed and is on the way."

What Is Your Mission?

How many times have you been at a social event and someone asks you what you do? After telling them you work at Help Everyone agency, the next question is usually, “Well what does Help Everyone agency do”? Do you then begin to recite a litany of services your agency provides, or can you summarize the purpose of your organization in a sentence or two so that it is understandable for anyone?

If you can do the latter, you probably have a well-constructed Mission Statement. If your organization’s Mission Statement is like most of those we encounter, it may be too long (should be no more than twenty-five words), may contain jargon only understood by those in the industry, and/or may be too specific.

The Girls Scouts of America’s Mission statement is “To Help Each Girl Reach Her Own Highest Potential.” It is short, easily understood, general in nature, and descriptive. When formulating a Mission Statement, follow the traditional KISS formula – Keep It Simple, Silly.

Most organizations include a discussion of the Mission when orienting new staff. The Mission Statement is usually prominently displayed in various places in the agency. One should expect that staff and board will be able to recite the Mission without difficulty. Test them yourself. Can they? If not, it may be time to revise the Mission Statement.

Does the statement inspire your board and staff to action? Does it convey your organization’s uniqueness, so that potential contributors will be interested in helping you? Are you limited in taking advantage of new business opportunities because your Mission Statement defines where services are provided and/or to whom?

When formulating a Mission Statement, it is always interesting to test it out on others who don’t know much about the organization. Consider TIL’s Mission Statement: *Providing Management Services During Times of Organizational Change*. We think it clearly describes our company’s Mission. Does it?

Defining Your Core Values

The third leg of the planning stool defines the organization’s core values. Values are the precepts and principles that guide the decision-making process. In other words, the organizational culture is based on its values. How board and staff behave is a reflection of the Core Values.

We often see agencies listing their values as part of their Mission Statement. Usually they are preceded with a statement such as: “We will accomplish our Mission through the following principles.”

We believe Core Values should be a stand-alone statement, separate from the Mission. The Values should be given the appropriate status with both Vision and Mission.

There are no specific guidelines for how many values should be included in the statement. Each value should be stated in behavioral terms, such as: “*The Do Everything agency will recruit and retain the most competent staff possible.*”

The development of the value statements is very important. These statements convey what the organization stands for and what it considers important as it works to fulfill its Mission and reach its Vision.

Summary

The Strategic Thinking and Planning phase begins with the development of three critical legs of the planning foundation: the Vision, Mission, and Value Statements. The three legs to the planning stool will provide the general guideposts for the rest of the process.

The Vision identifies the future destination of the planning journey. The Mission defines what route will be taken. The Values describe the vehicles that will be used to accomplish both the Mission and Vision.

Thought For The Month

“You Do Not Have To Change,
Survival Is Not Mandatory”

Deming

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