

Making Mission Statements Meaningful

ANOTHER LONG DAY at the office. You did your job well, but you don't feel that you were as effective as you should have been. If you often feel this way, perhaps it's because you don't always understand why you do the things you do. Perhaps it's hard to understand how what you do fits into the big picture. Perhaps you don't have a mission statement.

A mission statement? Of course, you have one. Didn't you just see it the other day somewhere? OK, maybe that was last year, but so what?

Every successful business sets and achieves goals. And so it is with training departments. Training was formed for a reason and it's important to document what that reason is.

Do you know the purpose of your department? Do others in your organization? If not, does confusion often result?

Let's compare mission statements. My company's states, "It is [our mission] to provide strategic products and services with exceptional value to corporate and government trainers while treating our customers, suppliers, and employees as we personally like to be treated." It further states, "This mission will be achieved by providing exceptional customer service, by providing superior quality products...and by being cost conscious for our customers." It states what we intend to achieve and how we intend to achieve it. It keeps us focused on our tasks (products for trainers) and also lets us know what not to do (don't develop products for MIS people). It also tells us how to behave (cheating our customers is not acceptable). But it does not mention goals, nor should it.

A mission statement keeps the training staff focused on what they are working to accomplish. In short, it tells you what to do and what not to do. For example, an employee's job is not to develop organizational charts nor is it to redesign the assembly line. It is to provide learning systems. Anything else is a distraction to accomplishing that mission.

Every action by staff should align with the mission statement. They should be asking themselves every

DEVELOP YOUR OWN MISSION STATEMENT

You don't have to begin a major project to complete a mission statement and you don't need focus groups and review meetings. Here are some tips:

- ▶ Examine your organization's mission statement. The mission statement of your training department must complement the company's mission, so make sure that your goals further the company's. For example, if your company's mission is to provide automobile parts, then your statement should have something to do with providing these skills to your organization via employee development. Don't make your statement too narrow or too broad.

- ▶ Identify your most important job duty. When developing your department's mission statement, think about what is your most important duty today. Ask yourself why it is so important? Was it important yesterday? Will it still be important tomorrow? Is this duty strategic to the organization's success? What is the most important work duty you

could do this month? This year? Build your mission statement on what is important.

- ▶ Make your statement mission-oriented, not task-oriented. Your mission is not to provide 40 hours of training for every employee a year. Nor is it to develop 12 new courses this year. Those may indeed be goals by which to achieve your mission, but the mission itself is related to why your training department exists.

- ▶ Advertise. So many times, a good mission statement is filed away. If you ask any Marine what the mission of the Marine Corps is, you will hear it loud and clear. And it is more than just memorized; it dictates their very being. So take a lesson from the Marines and broadcast yours loud and clear.

- ▶ Gain management's approval. Make sure that not only management, but all your company's departments understand and support your mission statement. This will help you define your expectations and the expectations of those you serve.

day, "Is what I am doing right now—including every phone call I make and every fax I send—helping to accomplish our mission?" If not, then why are they doing it?

Mission statements generally do not change over time. Missions should be consistent from year to year, even decade to decade. Even organizations with a consistent mission can be dynamic and responsive. That's probably why they are dynamic and responsive. They are not shooting at a moving target.

Do not confuse the mission with the objectives for achieving that mission. The objectives can, and probably do, change often.

For example, the mission of the Drug Enforcement Agency appears to change constantly. One year, they direct their forces against the small drug dealers on the street. The next year,

they target the distributors. The following year they concentrate on the producers. However, the mission of the DEA undoubtedly has something to do with enforcing the drug laws of the U.S., and, while the objectives change rapidly, the mission probably has not changed since the agency was created.

After developing your training mission statement, publish it. Include it in every course workbook and catalog. And fax or e-mail a copy to me.

Bob Dust is president of Gyrus Systems, 620 Moorefield Park Drive, Suite 200, Richmond, VA 23236; phone: 804/320-1414; fax: 804/320-2323; e-mail: Bob.Dust@ASTD.noli.com

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