



## CATHEDRAL CONSULTING GROUP, LLC

### Creating a Mission Culture

Your organization's mission statement is short enough to memorize. The statement is posted on every wall and you believe every member of your staff knows it. Yet, you still get a sense that people are working for a job, not for how you are changing the world. At Cathedral, we have seen organizations perish because individuals do not get the vision.

This Topic of the Month outlines how an organization can create and instill a mission culture within an organization. Through solidifying the organization's mission statement and vision statements, and supporting these through systems and lifestyles, an organization can increase their efficiency and effectiveness in dramatic ways.

#### **Solidify the Mission Statement**

An organization should be able to compare the objectives of its programs to the mission statement. It is an excellent way to ensure that you will be staying true to the services you have promised to offer to the community. Keep in mind your mission statement was reviewed by the Internal Revenue Service to verify that the organization's purpose matches the requirements obtaining tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) status.<sup>1</sup> It is essential to make sure that the statement you are sharing with the public matches the services that you are offering.

Take some time to examine your existing mission statement. If you don't have one, now is the perfect time to create one. The mission statement of your organization needs to flow out of the way that you answer two questions:

1. What do we do?
2. Who cares?

#### *What do we do?*

The answer to this question, ideally, should be your mission statement. This is your elevator speech: a solid ten to twenty words that provide a summary of your organization's reason for existence. It should be a statement that can be easily taught to everyone who does business with you. The ability to articulate your organization's purpose through a profoundly simple mission statement will get you further than any other marketing tactic.

#### *Who cares?*

In having answered the question of what you do; ask yourself whom this work will impact. And don't say, "everyone." Be honest with yourself. Most people don't know and don't care that you exist. The liberating conclusion, then, is that somewhere out there is a group of committed people who really do care. Only when you are absolutely clear as to who really cares about the efforts of your organization can you actively seek, find, and motivate those people.

#### **Solidify the Vision Statement**

A vision statement is the essence of an organization's beliefs and values. It is the highest bar

<sup>1</sup> 1 Internal Revenue Service, "Exemption Requirements," 05 Jan. 2009, 20 Jan. 2009  
<http://www.irs.gov/charities/charitable/article/0,,id=96099,00.html>.

your organization will always strive for. It defines the organization's place in the world and establishes a long-term direction that guides every aspect of an organization's daily operations. A vision statement answers the question: "What does the world look like when the organization achieves its mission?"

Developing a vision statement can be culture-specific, either analytical in nature or creative through a story. Note that while it should paint an attractive picture of the future, it should be both realistic and ambitious. In other words, it should challenge your staff without overwhelming them. In addition, in contrast to the mission statement, a vision statement can be compellingly rich and does not have to be concise. Overall, the vision statement has to bring the organization members and key stakeholders in touch with the world they are saving. It has to allow them to believe that their effort and commitment can turn a possibility into a reality.

### **Systemize Achievement of the Mission**

As mentioned, despite a great mission and vision statement, you may hear your mission stated with a sigh that belies a feeling of boredom at the trite or oversimplified phrasing. The goal, of course, is to get a sincere and energetic fist pump, a burst of energy that arises from the mere articulation of the mission of your organization. This happens through systemization and living the mission.

#### *Internalize the Mission and Vision*

First, your employees, donors and constituents need to internalize your mission and vision in order to get the sense that their activities play a role in the organization's purpose. It's best if everyone is able to memorize your mission statement, so that when people say, "What do you do?" they can recite it confidently.

#### *Documentation and Training*

Second, culture change is about systems change. The organization's internal systems of the organization, when aligned and articulated according to the mission and vision, will be brought forth into each aspect of the organization's culture. There are many systems in an organization, including:

- Marketing and Donor Cultivation
- Program Design and Development
- Organization Structure
- Strategy and Planning
- Technology
- Internal Controls
- Financial Systems

Investing in a series of systems for the company allows and staff to be more productive and effective. These systems might include templates, checklists, forms, standardized methodologies, and technology systems. Generally, once clear documentation of the desired system is created, then training should follow. Training should allow each staff member to see his or her unique role in fulfilling the mission of the organization. Consistent monitoring of the implementation to be sure follows. In time, the system becomes imbedded in the company culture. Documentation of the systems should also be stored in a location that is easily accessible to all, such as a central server or cloud services such as Dropbox or SugarSync. Overall, an organization will find it difficult to grow and distinguish itself if equal attention is not given to both documentation and implantation. Systems will not implement themselves. Steady and consistent reinforcement is key, as is leading by example. If leadership is not using the systems, staff cannot be expected to also be compliant.

## **Live the Mission**

Motivation is at the heart of any nonprofit's activity. Your daily to do list should contain a majority of outward-focused activity. Your job is to motivate people: donors, constituents, employees and volunteers. Staff should see you and see that although you have many things to accomplish to achieve the mission and vision, you cannot do it alone.

Furthermore, you should be the example by living the mission. In discussions with staff, always ask, "What is the highest value task we could be completing right now in order to fulfill our mission?" When the organization begins to look at daily tasks this way, everyone will have a sense of what their current highest value task and will feel they are each moving the organization further in accomplishing its mission.

Just as stories may articulate the vision of the organization, stories can also be used to instill the mission of the organization among staff. Management should think of examples when people in the organization have embodied the mission, vision or supporting systems. The story about the Executive Director who drove through a snowstorm to deliver a Thanksgiving dinner to a needy family who couldn't come to the shelter is one of the "legends" that get retold time after time and help keep the guiding principles of the organization alive.

Regular performance reviews are another way to discuss the mission relative to staff performance. In addition to providing regular feedback and establishing goals and targets, employees can discuss how they are successful in contributing to the mission and what areas that need growth.

Lastly, a regular internal review of the organization's activities relative to the mission is important for the integrity of the organization as a corporate unit. But it is also good to share this information with your public. The Annual Meeting is the perfect opportunity to share your look back and reflect on past occurrences as well as cast the vision for the future. We counsel clients to have a first quarter Annual Meeting to which all constituents are invited to hear about last year's accomplishments and this year's goals. If you have the time and the resources, the best way to present this information to the public is through a published Annual Report.

The message of this paper is simple: having a great mission and vision statement is necessary but not sufficient. Implementation of these guiding principles only comes through an intentional effort to permeate them throughout the organization through systems, stories and actions.

## **Articles for Further Reading**

1. Hull Tegarden, Page; Denise Rothman, and Paul Sturm. [The Nonprofit Organizational Culture Guide: Revealing the Hidden Truths that Impact Performance](#). San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2011
2. Cathedral Consulting Group, LLC. *Avoid the Death Spiral: Investing in Your Employees and Increasing the Bottom Line*. July 2010.
3. Lencioni, Patrick. [The Three Signs of a Miserable Job](#). San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2007.

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