

DEVELOPING A PURPOSE STATEMENT

Every organization needs a purpose statement. This tool explains what a purpose statement is and provides examples. It also includes a process for developing a purpose statement.

Tip: This tool can be used in conjunction with LRI's [Six Rings Planning Model®](#) tool.

Definitions and Examples

A purpose statement is typically written in conjunction with a vision statement. Purpose captures what the organization fundamentally does. Vision communicates what it ultimately hopes to achieve. In addition, we strongly recommend that organizations clearly communicate their core values as well – these are the things the company stands for and will not compromise.

A purpose statement should be memorable enough so that everyone connected to the organization can remember it and use it. A purpose statement should be anchored in the present-day – describing what the organization fundamentally does – in contrast to a vision statement, which is future-oriented.

We encourage companies to develop a purpose statement rather than a mission statement. A mission statement tends to be a hodgepodge of purpose, values and vision, resulting in a lack of clarity and focus. Here is an example:

“Apex Systems supplies technically innovative software and hardware solutions to the OEM computer market that provide long-term benefits to our customers and our investors.”

A strong purpose statement, on the other hand, is clearer and more inspiring. Here are some well-executed purpose statements. Note how crisp, succinct and memorable they are:

Google: Our purpose is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.

3M: Our purpose is to solve unsolved problems innovatively.

Merck: Our purpose is to preserve and improve human life.

SETI Institute: Our purpose is to explore, understand, and explain the origin, nature, prevalence and distribution of life in the universe.

Hewlett-Packard: Our purpose is to make technical contributions for the advancement and welfare of humanity.

Sony: Our purpose is to experience the joy of advancing and applying technology for the benefit of the public.

Wal-Mart: Our purpose is to give ordinary folk the chance to buy the same things as rich people.

Process for Developing a Purpose Statement

- In advance of a meeting of the planning team, have each member of the team complete the worksheet on the next page.
- At the drafting meeting, review each person's responses.
- Draft a preliminary purpose statement incorporating the elements that the group has decided best capture why the organization exists.
- Review and revise.
- Once the team agrees on a draft statement, circulate the draft to a wider audience of stakeholders for review and feedback.

Purpose Statement Planning Worksheet

Each member of the planning team should write down their answers to these questions in advance of the planning meeting.

1. Why does our organization exist? What need do we fulfill?

2. Who are our customers? What is the essence of what we're trying to achieve for them?

3. What distinguishes us? What makes us different from everybody else?

Draft Purpose Statement

Instructions: Taking into consideration your thoughts above, what is the essential purpose of the organization? Boil it down to a single sentence that is simple and memorable. Bring this sheet with you and be prepared to share it with members of your planning team.

4. DRAFT: What is the purpose of our organization?