



Stanford eCorner

Don't Write a Mission Statement, Write a Mantra

Guy Kawasaki, *Garage Technology Ventures*

October 20, 2004

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/1172/Dont-Write-a-Mission-Statement-Write-a-Mantra>

Kawasaki talks about how a mission statement, while touted as necessary for any company, often is not representative of the true meaning of the company. Instead, a mantra is shorter and captures the essence of the organization.



Transcript

The second thing I learned is to make mantra. Many of you have not yet been polluted by the desire to make a mission statement. The desire to make a mission statement comes because you have a graduate school, business degree, or perhaps you work for McKenzie for summer. Or something like that has ruined you. And so many, many entrepreneurs take it as one of the fundamental things they have to do is figure out a mission statement. So what they do is they grab the core team. There's somebody from marketing, from sales, from engineering, from production, finance, HR. And they go offsite and they craft this mission statement. And everybody has to put their two cents in because this mission statement has to be workable for employees, for shareholders, for customers, for the dolphins, for the purposes. In the ozone hole, all that has to be in a mission statement.

So what I recommend is that you don't do a mission statement as a start-up because a mission statement usually ends up crap. It's too long, it's impossible to remember. It cannot even focus the company which is what it should do. Inevitably you will end up with the mission statement along these lines. "The mission of Wendy's is to deliver superior quality products and services for our customers and communities through leadership, innovation, and partnerships." How many of you thought that that was Wendy's mission statement when you bought a hamburger there? How many of you think you could go to Trixie or Beef working at Wendy's and ask them, "What's the mission of Wendy's?" And they can repeat that word for word. It's impossible. That is a \$50,000 mission statement done by a consulting firm. I love Wendy's. Don't get me wrong, I love Wendy's. But the mission statement leaves a lot to be desired.

By contrast, you should do a mantra. Do a mantra because it's only three or four words. It captures the essence of your organization. When you have a thousand employees or 10,000 employees and you can hire a facilitator or you can go outside and you can use McKenzie. God bless you! Write this mission statement. It will make you feel better. You can put it up in your annual report. You can post it in your cafeteria or whatever you want to do. But right now, as an entrepreneur make a mantra. Here are some mantras.

First thing is. I think Wendy's proper mantra is "Healthy fast food". Three words, healthy fast food. Somewhat oxymoronic I must admit but healthy fast food is something very easy to remember. Another good mantra: FedEx. FedEx's mantra in my mind should be "Peace of mind". Because when you absolutely, positively want something in some place, you think of FedEx. The FedEx employee is thinking peace of mind for our customers. A third mantra from Nike, "Authentic athletic performance". Just do it is the slogan.

It's the slogan for the customer. Authentic athletic performance is the mantra for the employee. That's what a Nike employee stands for, authentic athletic performance. And one of the best mantras is from Mary Kay, "Enriching women's lives". This is a good mantra because it worked for two groups, the customer of Mary Kay who buys the Mary Kay products and also the sales person of Mary Kay. It enriches both people's lives. So these are examples of mantras. And I would suggest to you that you come up with three or four-word thing like that. For me my personal mantra is empowering entrepreneurs. That's what I do.

OK, now if some of you still have the desire to create a mission statement because I don't know why, because you've been ruined somehow. So if you have this great desire to do a mission statement rather than taking your team offside and going away for a day, and using a consulting firm, and crafting some 50-word thing, and wasting a lot of time and money. I suggest to you that you can kill two birds with one stone. All you have to do is go to the Dilbert Mission Statement Generator website. And there for absolutely no cost, you can get a mission statement like the one you want. Like, "We exist to professionally build long-term high-impact sources so that we may endeavor to synergistically leverage existing effective deliverables to stay competitive in tomorrow's world." See, that's a mission statement. I mean that's something you can be proud of putting in your annual report. Don't pay 50,000 for this. Just go to the Dilbert Mission Statement Generator website, OK?