



# Building a Winning Culture: Lead with Purpose

In Mumbai, India, a city of 17 million people, fast food has a unique meaning. Every workday, about five thousand “dabbawalas,” or “lunch-box people,” deliver nearly a quarter-million home-cooked lunches to workers around this vast, tumultuous city — at high speed and without error!

“Effort and courage are not enough without **purpose** and **direction.**”

— John F. Kennedy

As Sarah Sturtevant writes in her Marketing Masala blog, “The mission of the dabbawalas is not couched in flowery words like so many other corporate mission statements. Their simple goal is to serve their customers accurately and on time, every time.” They also have a unique value proposition: Unlike fast food chains, they bring a hot lunch right to *you*, no matter where you are.

People with a simple, unique, powerful mission are the most engaged people. Yet the whole notion of “mission” has produced a lot of cynicism. There are two reasons for that:

1. Too many mission statements are meaningless platitudes.
2. People in the organization don't live up to the mission.

## FIND AND ARTICULATE THE VOICE OF THE ORGANIZATION

Say the phrase “mission statement,” and many people roll their eyes. Contests are held online for the worst mission statement. The bronze mission statement plaque becomes a target for pigeons. According to Gallup, *70 percent* of U.S. workers are disengaged — unimpressed and uninterested in their company's mission. Why are most mission statements just back room jokes? Because we're trying to engage people's passions and talents in a mission they have no passion for, and no involvement in.

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Yet, there is nothing more powerful than the passions that drive people. Tap into those, and you create an unstoppable force. But management often boils out all the passion to reduce it to a mediocre mission statement, and that's where cynicism comes from.

Shawn Moon, author of *The Ultimate Competitive Advantage*, says, "I was working with a group of leaders from an organization once, when I noticed that on the wall of their boardroom was a beautifully framed copy of their mission statement. The words were nice and the sentiment meaningful. With the leaders all sitting around the boardroom table and the framed mission statement just a few feet away, I said, 'On the wall is your mission statement. Don't look at it. Who can tell me what it says?' Crickets. 'Who can tell me the gist of what it says?' Again, crickets. What followed was an interesting discussion on what a mission statement really is and how individuals and organizations bring them to life."

While your true mission will be unique, in broad strokes they all sound something like this: *We are going where no other people can go because no other people are like us. No one else has the unique combination of talent, passion, and conscience that drives us. No one else can make the contribution we can make.*

THE JOB USED TO BE...	THE JOB THAT YOU MUST DO NOW...
Put a framed mission statement on the wall	Find and articulate the voice of the organization  Regularly evaluate the "job your team is being hired to do" right now

The dabbawalas are like that. They are intensely proud of the service they have given for more than a century, a service no one can duplicate. Other great companies are like that, too. Passion for the mission governs everything they do. According to Mark Zuckerberg, "Facebook was not originally created to be a company. It was built to accomplish a social mission — to make the world more open and connected." The company therefore draws people who have the energy for that mission.

So call it what you want. If people are allergic to the term "mission statement," call it a mantra or a manifesto or a purpose statement or "the voice of the organization." Whatever you call it, you need it badly. The old paradigm of management is to put a mission statement on the wall and forget about it; the new paradigm of leadership is to help people find their

### MISSION STATEMENT SAMPLES

To provide the public with the best possible fire suppression, emergency, medical, and fire-prevention service, and to treat all individuals as if they were family.

—Fire Station 51

Our purpose is to empower logistics for companies and organizations with winning aspirations who seek to make a difference.

—Swedish Software-Development Company

voice — both individually and collectively.

### DESIGNING AN ENGAGING MISSION

How do you design a mission or a sense of purpose that will engage everyone?

The mission should be the collective voice of the people in your organization, not just the leader's voice. The principle of “no involvement, no commitment” clearly applies to the creation of a mission statement. If you want everyone to own the mission, it has to reflect their thinking, express their potential, and appeal to their souls.

How do you find this “voice of the organization”? Stephen R. Covey said, “Voice lies at the nexus of talent [what we do well], passion [what we love to do], conscience [what we ought to do], and need [what the world will pay us to do].”

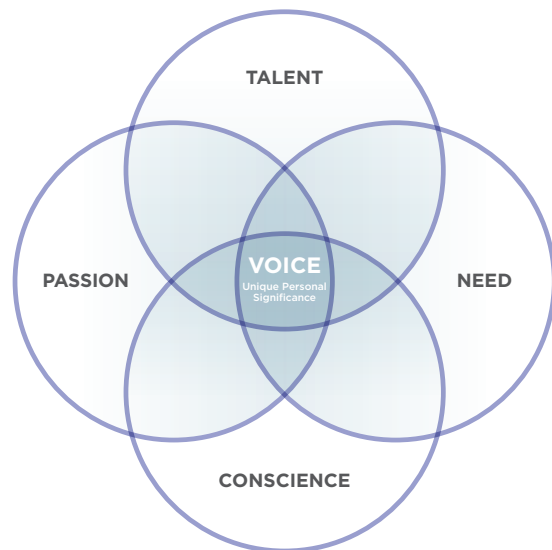
**“Voice** lies at the **nexus** of talent...passion...conscience...and need.”

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In other words, an engaging organizational voice or mission must appeal to people's passionate interests, leverage their distinctive talents, satisfy the conscience, and meet a compelling market need. It's not easy to fulfill all of these criteria at the same time, but the leader's job is to combine all those elements of the organization's “voice.” Leaders who do so tap into a miraculous power source.

Begin now to evaluate the mission of your team or organization:

### “VOICE” CONVERSATION



- Talent. Are you leveraging the irreplaceable talents of team members?
- Passion. Do they approach their job with energy and determination, or do they just go through the motions?
- Conscience. Is your organization doing what it should do? Are you tapping into people's innate desire to be socially responsible?
- Need. What is the specific job your internal and external customers are hiring you to do? The job you are being hired to do is very different from a job description. It requires careful stakeholder analysis: What are they trying to achieve through your contribution? What are they willing to *pay* for? Are you in sync with the needs of an ever-evolving market? Are you staying on top of market hot spots, or are they moving away from you?

In today's world, a leader has a moral imperative to connect the “why” behind the “what” to meaningfully engage their talent. This is most powerfully accomplished by thoughtful and deliberate design.

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What you are really doing when you map out your mission statement is telling your team story. What anecdotes do you tell about your own successes? Your failures?

Imagine your mission statement as a lead story in the news — what would be the headline? What would make the story viral? It is the job of a leader to engage all stakeholders through a compelling strategic narrative on mission or a team's purpose?

### GET ALIGNED TO THE MISSION

What's the second reason people are cynical about the company mission statement? The company is so often misaligned with it. The grand pronouncements don't line up with the things people are asked to do every day. In short, managers and leaders don't walk the talk. If the mission statement is about "valuing customers above all" while management obsesses over everything *but* the customers, people simply disengage from the mission.

Assuming you really want people to engage with the mission, everything you do needs to align with it. This means carefully examining and possibly redesigning the core processes of the organization — everything from strategy to marketing to R&D to sales to compensation. Are any of these processes undermining the mission?

Every core process needs to support the mission in a simple, visible, and consistent way. Think of the core process in the dabbawala organization. After collecting the lunchboxes between nine and ten in the morning, they pack them onto trolleys and push them to the railway stations. The boxes go by train to a central station for unloading, then color-coded so they end up in a similar destination as other boxes. At the receiving station, the dabbawalas load the boxes onto their trademark silver bicycles. They only have their bicycles, the coded boxes, and the city train system as a resource. And then in the afternoon they reverse the process,



Dabbawalas photograph is courtesy of and copyrighted by Firoze Shakir.

The dabbawalas take pride in their **consistent quality of service**. They wear distinctive white caps and tunics, and their silver bicycles are recognized everywhere. There is no overreliance on technology, but a lot of **reliance on a winning team**.

picking up the empty boxes and returning them to the residents.

After studying the dabbawalas' core processes, *Forbes* compared it to a Six Sigma process, which means the lunchbox men make only one error in every sixteen million transactions! According to the professionals who evaluated their system, the dabbawalas' process works so well because it is *simple, visible, and consistent*. Everyone, from the youngest dabbawala to the chairman of the association, can describe the *simple* process. The dabbawalas know exactly where they are going 100 percent of the time.

The system is *visible*. The lunchbox code contains the entire work process, from start to finish. A few symbols on each lid indicate exactly where the lunchbox came from and where it is going.

And *consistency* is, of course, the hallmark of the dabbawalas' service. You can count on them without question. The dabbawalas take pride in their consistent quality of service. They

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The passion of the dabbawalas means they never let down a customer. When a disastrous monsoon struck Mumbai in 2005, the city's network of trains stopped completely. So the dabbawalas made their way to checkpoints on foot, carrying the dabbas through torrential rains and floods. Few if any customers were missed. Uninterrupted service is that important to the dabbawalas.

What about your core processes? What could you do to simplify your processes? Make them more visible? Make them more consistent with the mission of the organization and consistent in execution?

In the end, people will never engage with a “mission” that is not a mission, that is meaningless corporate-speak. And if they're not asked to live by it, the mission doesn't matter anyway. But if you want to engage the full power of

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your people, involve them in finding your organization's voice. Then let that voice govern everything you do.

### LEADING WITH PURPOSE: ACTION STEPS

Here are the key steps to lead your team or organization with purpose. Involve your team in discussing these questions. The outcomes should be (1) an *engaging* mission statement and (2) core processes that clearly support that mission.

#### Step 1: Find the voice of your team.

- Do we have a written team mission? Does it inspire our energy and determination, or are we just going through the motions?
- Does our mission leverage the irreplaceable talents of each team member? Do we even know what those talents are?
- Does our mission meet the demands of conscience? Are we socially responsible?
- What is the specific job our customers are hiring us to do? Is it changing?
  - Who are our most important customers and stakeholders?
  - What are their most important goals?
  - What unique capabilities do we bring to help them meet those goals? What are they “hiring” us to do or provide?
- Given our answers to these questions, how can we refine our mission or purpose statement?

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### Step 2: Align with the mission.

- What are our core processes?  
Do our core processes clearly support the mission?
- What do we need to make our processes:
  - Simple?
  - Visible?
  - Consistent?

Learn more about the second key practice to engage your people in our next article, *Building a Winning Culture: Execute with Excellence*.

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Ready to build a winning culture in your organization? **Contact us at 1-888-868-1776 or visit [franklincovey.com](https://www.franklincovey.com).**

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