5 Top Tips for Crafting Mission and Vision Statements with Meaning

August 28, 2021 7 min read

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

I always thought vision and mission statements were corporate rubbish that – metaphorically or actually – made up the opening slides of an overly long and unnecessary presentation that no one ever read, let alone something that inspired people. In fact, until recently, the only one I ever thought was any good was Patagonia's, which reads: "We're in business to save our home planet."

Then, earlier this year, my team and I pulled a jumble of thoughts and feelings into a simple, understandable, and inspirational sentence, and Ethique's vision was born: "We believe business is the catalyst for social and environmental change to benefit people and the planet."

We were often known as the "shampoo bar company", or one that makes "plastic-free stuff." Both are true, but we are much more than that, and it got to the point where being pigeonholed that way began to annoy me.

I founded Ethique back in 2012 – well before the plastic-free movement of today – because I wanted to change the world through business… to inspire consumers to demand more of their brands, including more environmentally sound decisions, more transparent supply chains, fair and equitable operations and less wasteful design. Put simply, I wanted a much more

regenerative business model, and to prove to other businesses that operating as ethically as possible was both doable and financially sustainable.

And here we are today, having won numerous awards and found in over 4,000 retailers globally, with a team of 25 across offices in four countries and most importantly, having spared the planet more than 12 million plastic bottles. But there is so much more to do, and so an additional endeavor we are committed to is educating and inspiring others. Our vision plays a big part in that, in explaining what we are here to do, and why.

Related: How to Ensure That Your Mission Statement Matters

What is the difference between a vision and a mission statement?

A vision explains the future of a brand – where you want to go. The BBC has a nice succinct one: "To be the most creative organization in the world". Mission is how you will get there. Again, the BBC's is, "To enrich people's lives with programmes and services that inform, educate and entertain".

To add something else into the mix, there is your "Why," or purpose statement. Not surprisingly, it's an explanation of why you started the company…what gets you up in the morning. The BBC isn't quite so succinct here; they have six of them, but one is to "stimulate creativity and cultural excellence".

But why does stating what might seem blindingly obvious matter?

Done well, statements inspire

An articulate vision and mission inspires your team, customers, partners and suppliers. Inspiration causes people

to think bigger, bolder, care more and reach further. Rather than selling something for the sake of it, you are “helping humanity thrive by enabling all teams to work together effortlessly” (that’s Asana’s). Or you could refer to the British-American inspirational speaker and author Simon Sinek’s own: “Inspiring people to do the things that inspire them so that, together, we can change the world”.

Related: 7 Mission Statements That Inspire You to Buy

Retention impact

This is obvious. No less than 74% of employees want to work for an organization doing good, so make it obvious that yours is one of them. Keeping good people is a struggle if all you have to work with is higher salaries and bigger perks.

A guiding light

Most businesses will be offered plenty of opportunities and, especially in the early days, it’s easy to wander off a planned track in chasing all of them down. Having a purpose, vision or mission (you don’t have to start with all three) narrows down why you are doing this, so you don’t waste time and money on things that ultimately don’t get you where you want to go.

Brand building

A business that knows why it exists is so much more powerful than one that just seems to be in it for the money. It’s something you drape throughout communications, both external and internal – something that your team and partners understand to be truly fundamental to the brand, and, done well, is something that your customers can talk about when asked. Whenever we have an initial meeting with a potential partner, be it investor, retailer, distributor or whomever, we

start with our purpose and vision. It’s so much more inspiring than just selling a shampoo product, and immediately people understand why they want to talk to us.

Writing a good statement is tricky, though, and often your first few iterations won’t be the final one you land on. So, to help, here are some tips on how to write vision and mission varities that mean something to you, and will inspire others to follow your brand.

1. Think about your “Why?”

Why are you here? What do you want to see in the world? What problems are you solving? For us, “it is to reimagine the beauty & personal care industry, to be fair & kind to people and planet”. Think about what really matters and what motivated you to start your enterprise. And it doesn’t have to be some grandiose, “I want to save the world” manifesto, but there must be *something* underneath it all.

2. Brainstorm with the team

Good statements rarely come from one person. Work with your team to throw around ideas, see what resonates with the group, what doesn’t, and start noting down some key terms and thoughts. It might take some time to come together, but that’s fine. Don’t have a team? Try friends, family…people you pass on the street. Everyone will have a different perspective, which can really help.
When we were doing this a few months ago, I became frustrated with my inability to explain what I meant as a whole. Thankfully, my team had been listening to me for years and were far better able to articulate it, add to those thoughts and together we came up with something we all love.

3. Don’t talk about what you do

These succinct sentences are not the place for what you do (i.e. the products you sell). Look at it from the consumers point of view. What is the benefit for them, or the partner who may work with you? I’m not excited by shampoo in the slightest, but *am* excited about the idea of changing the beauty industry into one that is kind to people and planet.

4. Don’t go on and on

It’s hard to keep statements to a sentence or two, but the best ones are short. Less is more! I believe our mission statement is too long at two sentences, but I know it will evolve over the next few months into something punchier.

Related: 8 Ways a Vision Statement Adds Value to Any Business

5. Write down every thought, however odd

Every creative agency that writes for brands will try and suck everything you think out of your head in their discovery page, even what you might consider to be completely irrelevant. So, when you are writing these yourself, go through the same process. Think big, think wide, think obscure, inside out and outside in (from your perspective and from your consumer’s). Write it all down, then return to it in a couple of days and start deleting what doesn’t fit or resonate.

Still struggling? Remember that in the end, your purpose, vision and mission are all right there, and have been all along. Each makes up the foundation of why you do what you do, so you will get there.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/378478