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Linking Organizational Pride to Purpose

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Is your organization proud? That may seem like an unusual question to ponder in difficult economic times like these, when most questions focus on whether an organization is secure. Why would anyone care to ask this question, and how does pride affect organizational success? From a leadership perspective, understanding how to tap into pride to achieve organizational success may appear to be a "soft" approach, especially when most companies fixate on metrics and measures. Although metrics are critical, linking pride to your organization's desired results just might be the lynchpin in a strategy for creating sustainable, long-term success—and an innovative way to address motivation and performance issues.

Pride turns out to have quite a bit to do with organizational success. When a team or organization exhibits pride, the result is genuine commitment and consistently successful projects. Because pride is intimately linked with purpose, this article explores the concept of the purpose statement, how it is used, and how it differs from a mission statement. In this article, we share a step-by-step process for creating and using a purpose statement and provide real-world examples of how leadership teams have tapped into pride to accelerate their strategic planning process and achieve top results.

MISSION VS. PURPOSE

A purpose serves to provide meaning and to connect team members to not only the work, but also the impact that work has on the company and its customers or clients. This is very different from a mission statement, which tends to be disseminated across an organization or handed down from the top. A mission statement defines the organization's work, why an organization exists, and the organization's future in terms of what its people want to accomplish. Mission statements tend to lack the fundamental emotional component of pride, which connects people to the statement and its meaning. This may sound soft, but the results that come from connecting people to the company's most critical work via emotion are anything but qualitative.

Let's illustrate the distinction between a *mission* statement and a *purpose* statement with some actual examples from companies. We are not suggesting that the following sample mission statement is in any way incorrect. Rather, our intent is to simply show a different process for eliciting the emotion of pride through the creation of a purpose statement and how this, in our experience, has mobilized positive change, gained greater buy-in, and yielded tremendous results for our clients.

The following mission statement was created for Coca-Cola shareholders:

The Coca-Cola Promise: The Coca-Cola Company exists to benefit and refresh everyone it touches. The basic proposition of our business is simple, solid, and timeless. When we bring refreshment, value, joy and fun to our stakeholders, then we successfully nurture and protect our brands, particularly Coca-Cola. That is the key to fulfilling our ultimate obligation to provide consistently attractive returns to the owners of our business.[1]

Simple, succinct, and clear, this well-crafted statement reads nicely for shareholders. If you read it from a pride perspective, you might wonder where executive team members and their direct reports could point in this statement to words that truly connect them to their impact and the work they must accomplish in order to achieve their business goals.

With that question in mind, the following purpose statement (from a different firm) demonstrates how the members of the executive team of a publicly held luxury-services company articulated what would make them proud as a team, how it connected to the impact they wanted to make on their customers and stakeholders, and what success would look like:

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We will feel proud when our team attracts, cultivates and inspires highly engaged, exceptional people who flourish in a collaborative environment, grounded in our values, and who bring their whole selves to work every day. And we will feel proud when our organization is the acknowledged leader and innovator in our markets. We deliver unique and sustainable value by serving critical client needs, making a real difference to our customers, and driving successful partnerships.

Here's another example of a purpose statement, this one created by the leadership team of a global pharmaceutical company:

We will feel proud when we lead by example, are inclusive, transparent with all our actions, and unlock our organization's potential. We are a recognized leader in our industry and lead a research site of self-empowered, high performing, innovative risk takers that delivers drugs that give value to patients, families and stakeholders around the world.

Many teams use their unique purpose statement to initiate, evaluate, and refine business strategies and activities while infusing the statement with their emotional connections to the work. As shown in the examples above, a purpose statement begins with "we will feel proud when..." This language immediately connects the team to their desired impact and what will make them proud. This is what distinguishes the purpose statement from a mission statement and enables team members to connect to the work in a much more effective manner. Together, they define what impact they want to make based on the work they do and specify the results they wish to achieve and what will make them feel truly proud. Leaders of a team and/or an organization must realize that pride is an incredibly powerful tool that allows them to not only tap into team members' energy and intrinsic motivation, but also harness that pride in the service of achieving top business results.

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The latest research demonstrates that superior leadership, measured by top-quartile business results and high employee morale, exercises a mind-set that supports a focus on pride and a thorough understanding of one's own purpose and the team's purpose. David Burnham, a prominent thought leader in the psychology of leadership, notes that "leadership is not something we do to others, but something we do with others. Through this lens, leaders see the people they lead as the source of power and an ultimate font of ideas, solutions and possibilities. They realize that results do not energize people; rather, energized people drive results."[2]

Our own experience with some of the companies that have been most successful weathering the current economic storm bears out Burnham's assertion. We have seen that the leaders who have had the fortitude to explore their own purpose and bring together their executive team to understand what will collectively make the whole team proud are the leaders who have had incredible business success over the last year.

APPLYING PURPOSE TO THE REAL WORLD

Over the course of this past year, we have found that discussing and defining purpose creates a much clearer path toward strategy formation, allowing leaders of organizations to develop realistic goals and outcomes, measures of success, and actions for addressing challenges along the way. For example, we worked with a global pharmaceutical company's newly acquired drug-discovery site, where the fragmented management team was plagued with leadership turnover, trust issues, and strategic misalignment. All these contributed to subpar results and extreme disappointment from senior management abroad. With the installation of a new, forward-thinking leader, the management team came together to address the research site's organizational issues and strategically plan how to deliver the expected results.

As part of the company's strategic planning work, we took the members of the research center's management team through the process of formulating a purpose statement. (This team's purpose statement is highlighted in the previous section.) As a result of going through this process, team members were able to quickly discern and articulate the most critical work that would both deliver expected results *and* positively

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affect their patients' lives through high-quality science. Connecting team members to their work via the impact they wished to have on science and on patients enabled this team to quickly mobilize and make transformational changes across the organization.

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After one year, the site surpassed senior management's deliverable expectations through enhanced project-review processes, increased individual and collective accountability, and improved talent-management and leadership capabilities. These improvements resulted in both the expected deliverable as well as the birth of new processes to encourage innovation and partnerships (internal and external) to the research site.

It would seem that external successes—enhanced marketplace reputation, achieved growth and profit expectations, and secured market leadership—would be the top responses to a question about what would make individuals proud. But in exploring the idea of pride and success with leadership teams over the past several years, we have developed research that reveals a much more human and internal focus in terms of what would make most executive teams feel proud when they look into the future. When we specifically ask executives what achievements they would feel proud to accomplish in the next three years, their responses related to the following objectives:

- established growth and development opportunities,
- enhanced and sustained staff motivation levels,
- developed and crystallized strategic focus,
- built high-performing teams,
- increased accountability, and
- created trusted relationships.

Although the external success of achieving positive financial results is the ultimate goal for executive teams, the most successful organizations we have worked with have been the ones able to harness the pride that revolves around an internal organizational focus—people, strategy, and relationships—and then leverage this to drive top business results.

For example, a newly appointed leader of an internal IT organization of a Fortune 50 retailer had inherited a disjointed leadership team. In each of their functions, team members were experiencing costly problems, and together the team had earned a subpar reputation for unreliability among their business counterparts. After we worked with this team through an extensive assessment and the subsequent strategic-planning process, the members could identify future elements that would make them proud. These elements included predominantly internally focused achievements (e.g., effective partnerships and shared accountabilities and collaboration); high-performing employees/teams and growth opportunities; and proactive, prioritized, and partnered planning.

With these achievements in mind, this team created a mobilizing purpose statement that the members subsequently have used as the backdrop to their leadership team meetings, as a chief driver of decisions, and as a consistent reminder of the mind-set they must have in order to achieve their desired impact. Over the course of the year, this team has made tremendous changes that have yielded dramatic results. The team members have made progress toward their ultimate goals of providing a stable information technology system for their clients and customers, as well as being a strategic partner to their business counterparts.

A similar turnaround resulted for an HR organization within a major retail company and the outsourcing service provider bound to it by a $180 million contract. At the onset of working with the organization, we quickly realized that pride was not part of this business partnership's lexicon. During the initial assessment work, however, we found that the members of this fragmented partnership had very similar ideas about what would truly make them proud as a team. These "pride points" included succeeding strategically together, implementing transformative initiatives, successfully delivering services, decreasing micromanagement, increasing confidence, and building a trusted partnership.

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Taking these partnered teams through the process of creating a purpose statement allowed them to break down the dysfunctional walls built up over a tumultuous 18-month period. It also allowed them to agree on how to address and prioritize the work that would ultimately affect the outcome they both desired: delivering high quality HR services to the retail client's employees. In addition to hitting the goals set out in their service-level agreements, the service provider also went on to win $200 million worth of new hardware business with their HR client.

FOUR STEPS TO CREATING A PURPOSE STATEMENT

How can leaders and their teams develop a purpose statement that engenders pride? Whether you decide to do this work with a third-party facilitator or on your own, the four fundamental steps in the process are the same. Each step requires that a few simple questions be asked of team members, and the answers are then integrated to eventually create a team purpose statement.

Step 1: General Brainstorming

The first question that must be asked here is, why is each team member at his or her job? The "why" is generally not just about the amount of compensation attached to the job. Although money is an essential driver for many people, financial motivation quickly falls short if people do not feel connected to their work. Ask individual team members to think more deeply about what each feels is most fulfilling and meaningful (personally) about his or her job and the work of the organization. The work of the organization is included because this question asks individuals to focus on their own work and think more broadly about how it fits into the larger picture of the organization's work.

Step 2: Reflecting on the Most Meaningful Jobs

Each individual should think back to a time he or she felt truly connected and happy, and when he or she was making a difference. This can be a current or past job, a volunteer experience, or any experience that was meaningful and memorable (e.g., parenting or coaching). Have each team member take a few moments to brainstorm individually and record a list of what each member liked about this particular meaningful event. Answering the following questions can help in this:

- What connected you to the event or experience?
- What emotions did you feel?
- What about it made you feel that way?

Next, have each person share his or her experience with the team and have someone capture the main ideas on a flip chart. When you review the list of what connected people individually, what themes emerge? Where is there overlap? This is a great starting point for getting in touch with what makes your team proud. Interestingly, simply by virtue of going through this exercise, your team may already be starting to feel pride, pleasure, and fulfillment.

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Step 3: Individual and Small-Group Statements

Using the list of themes generated from discussions about team members' most meaningful jobs, members then create their own personal purpose statement regarding their work and team, beginning the statement with "I will feel proud when..."

Depending on how large the executive team is, in pairs or trios discuss your individual purpose statements and, using elements from individual statements, create a small group purpose statement everyone agrees on. This statement should start with the phrase "We will feel proud when..."

Next, have the small groups present their statements and record these on a flip chart. Then have each statement evaluated by individuals and the entire group to determine the following: How well is the organization achieving each draft purpose statement? What specifically would they as individuals, and as a group, need to change in order to achieve each purpose statement? If they did so, what would be the out-

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come—for the business, for them individually, and for the group as a whole? This process allows for both the individual and the group to establish accountability, work focus, and desired outcomes—all of which will be imperative to integrate into the next step.

Step 4: Executive-Team Purpose Statement

Looking across each statement, the whole group will evaluate members' statements to highlight the elements they connect with and wish to bring forward to integrate into the team's final purpose statement. The whole team should begin to craft the final purpose statement starting with the phrase "We will feel proud when..."

Strive to achieve consensus around a final purpose statement that best answers the question "What will make us proud?"

Once the team agrees on its purpose statement, the next level of planning will be to establish measures of success. How will you know that the team is on track to achieving its purpose? It's also important to identify any potential paradoxes the team will face in achieving its purpose.

PURPOSE AND PRIDE LEAD TO SUCCESS

By going through the four-step process described here, you will create a purpose statement that clearly defines the company's most important work, the desired impact the team members wish to make through their work, and why they will feel proud when they achieve these results. Don't think of this process as a one-time event but as a consistent driver in the mind-set of each team member as he or she approaches the organization's strategic work moving forward. Team members' energy, motivation levels, and understanding of what will truly make them proud will directly translate into how they execute on the most critical work, yielding superior results for your company.

Depending on how large the executive team is, in pairs or trios discuss your individual purpose statements and, using elements from individual statements, create a small-group purpose statement everyone agrees on.

Although a mission statement is crucial for a company as a whole to guide and outline a vision for the organization, the purpose statement will anchor the leadership team and subsequent teams to the company's most important work. If your company has the rigor to consistently revisit and adjust the purpose statement as needed, project and organizational success will be the inevitable by-product of connecting people to the emotion of pride coupled with a clearly defined strategy.

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NOTES

1 Abrahams, J. (2007). 101 mission statements from top companies. New York: Top Speed Press; p. 40.

2 Burnham, D. (2002). Inside the mind of a world class leader. Retrieved March 16, 2010, from http://www.burnhamrosen.com/articles/Inside_the_Mind.pdf.

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