



Mission Critical

What's *the mission* of your company? It's such a simple question, but it's often overlooked. Most owners and employees struggle to provide an answer. Ask a co-worker what's the mission of your company, and I'll bet the answer you get will not be the right one. Most likely the response will be one of a personal nature, or perhaps even a humorous barb. Is that the way it should be? Shouldn't we know the mission?

From kindergarten through college we've been programmed to have a plan. If you played sports, you had a playbook. If you were in the military, you had a role in achieving the mission. Yet most of us work a full time job and cannot articulate the plan, direction, mission of the company we work for. Business owners I've asked will typically give a smirk and short answer, "...to be successful", usually followed by a look as if to say, 'are you stupid?' Is that good enough? Maybe. But how much more effective could you be if you knew where your ship was sailing?

I believe most *private* companies within our imaging industry can be generally placed into one of three descriptions:

- **Survival Business:** At these companies, everyone does what they must to survive. There's typically poor communication; lack of customer focus; and mediocre financial return. Employees exist for job fulfillment,

and not for a career. Morale throughout the company is sub-par at best, and working conditions mediocre. The owner and all of his crew are in it to survive financially, all the time looking over their shoulder for the next best opportunity.

- **Lifestyle Business:** This is a business where you work just hard enough to support a particular lifestyle. It's not about making tremendous profits; scaling it; or developing employees. It's about maximizing your time on the golf course, sailing, or some other hobby. For the employees, it's about taking enough laps around the track that they can pay their mortgage. There's nothing wrong with this structure as most people like repetition and convenience, as long as it's understood and implicitly agreed upon. It's not a bad place to work, but there's no pressing need for a mission.
- **Destination Business**—this is a company that is scaling for the purpose of being sold. This is for the entrepreneurial types who are looking for a payday. After that occurs, they may hang around for the ride, but that's not as important as converting their hard work into a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Typically these businesses are the most dialed-in as to their mission because they understand it drives the value to maximize the sale to the investor/buyer.

No matter what category you fall into—as long as you're satisfied, it's all good.

However if you have a direction—or mission—you're ability to make money, have more fun, and enjoy the massive amount of time we spend at our jobs, is going to be far better. It helps hold the team accountable, provides a sense of belonging, and allows you to accomplish more collectively. You'll also be able to recruit better talent and ultimately provide greater value to your customer.

It's also important to have an "adjustable" mission. One that can adapt to opportunities; change with new technology; and that can enhance your customer's experience. Even if your ladder is leaning up against the wrong wall, at least you're climbing somewhere, and you can always move your ladder. It's easier to change direction/course if you've been moving in one direction. Why? Because you've got experience—and that's priceless.

Ask your fellow employees what your mission is for 2015. If it's not a clear, easy to articulate, and shared by all, then take some time to create a "mission discussion" around the office. If nothing else, it will create a stir and perhaps yield fantastic results! ■

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