

# Dangerous Mission Statements

Should You Burn Yours?

I was sitting in a CEO's office when he excused himself to take an important call. While he was on the phone, I read through the mission, vision, and values statements hanging on his wall. When he hung up, I asked, "How do these documents influence what happens out there in the office every day?"

All too predictably, he rolled his eyes and chuckled. "Not much."

My advice to him was to do one of three things:

- 1) **Tear them up and throw them away.** Ignoring them is worse than not having them at all. These can be powerful documents when they are part of the fabric of the organization. Our nation was founded on ideas written on paper. But if they don't reflect the reality of what the organization stands for, they hurt the credibility of the leadership. Staff will assume there are other policies, procedures, plans, and pronouncements you produce that can also be ignored.
- 2) **Change the documents to reflect organizational realities.** If you're content to just let the organization define itself, go back to #1. But if you want to be a leader who takes your organization someplace, your staff deserves to know where that someplace is. You have to be realistic about where you are and what's possible, but paint a picture of a future that your staff would want to be a part of. You want to be successful and so do they. The leader's job is to inspire their followers to achieve that which they couldn't do on their own for the common good.
- 3) **Change the organization's (your) behavior to match the documents.** If you truly want these statements to be true and are willing to invest the resources to make them true, come up with a plan and commit to making it happen. Well-articulated foundational documents that are being lived out intentionally (even if imperfectly) provide clarity and set the tone for the culture of the organization. A healthy culture can account for 30% or more of an organization's productivity.



Mission statements, purpose statements, vision statements, values statements, strategy statements – call them what you will (and they aren't all the same thing, although not everyone agrees on the distinctions). You probably need some but not all of these documents to create foundational clarity for your organization.

Where does a busy leader find time to do this right? The cry of more "tangible" challenges tend to push this to the back burner or short-change the time needed to do it right. It takes a forward-thinking leader to recognize this effort as a high-return investment, not an expense. You wouldn't leave large amounts of cash in a non-interest-bearing account for years – you would make time to invest it well. So why let your A-level staff deliver C-level performance because you haven't provided the clarity and inspiration to take them to their full potential?

Ready to get serious about it? **enLumen Leadership Services** is here to help.

**enLumen Leadership Services: Lighting your path to better leadership.**