



Leadership NOTES

Fighting Fuzzy Purpose

Perhaps the first and most important task of a successful education leader is to establish clarity of purpose. The vocabulary list for this concept well known... mission statements, vision casting, core values identification, goal setting, coherence of effort, teamwork, and shared commitment to a common future. Successful education leaders often define this task by defining and attacking its enemy... **fuzzy purpose.** Organizational psychologists suggest that 70% of interpersonal conflict in the workplace is not the result of employees' poor interpersonal skills, but rather of unclear direction. Fuzzy purpose leads to a perpetual low performance state called psychic entropy. Entropy is a scientific term that refers to the degree of disorganization or randomness in a system. Psychic entropy, then, is the degree of disorganization of thought and intention in a person or a group. The effects of fuzzy purpose are well known... low energy, pettiness, interpersonal conflict, poor teamwork, and a lack of persistent follow-through.

Mission, Vision, and Core Values... taken together, form a powerful cocktail for curing fuzzy purpose. Each of these three key direction setting ingredients adds an essential element to the overall mixture. Mission establishes purpose, vision adds clarity and energy, and core values guide the day to day operations. When these three complementary forces combine, the result is clear, compelling direction. For individuals and for groups, clear direction results in high energy, graceful interaction, focus, persistence, teamwork, and collaboration.

Mission. In its essence, mission is the answer to the questions: What is my (our) purpose in this undertaking? Why am I (we) choosing to be a part in this enterprise? When it is all over, what are the most important contributions I want to make? Mission is foundational. It pertains to all our endeavors. It is long-lasting and doesn't change from application to application. Mission serves to provide our primary compass bearing, our general direction, even in uncertain times. A mission statement, then, whether it is that of an individual or that of a group, is an expression of this foundational, purpose describing, life's direction. A functioning mission provides real-time, dynamic, individual and organizational purpose and direction.

Key understandings on Mission:

1. Forgetting your mission leads to getting caught up in meaningless details.
2. Mission enables us to recognize and focus upon the important...and to say “no” to other attentions.
3. You are either living your mission or you are living someone else’s.

Vision. In its essence, vision is the answer to the question: What do I (we) want to create here, at this time? It is more focused than mission. Rather than a purpose or a direction, vision is a mental image of a desired future state. Vision is specific, it is tangible. It is an important project on the journey to mission fulfillment, not another expression of the mission itself. In contrast to mission, we hold many visions simultaneously. We finish some, begin to work on others, all the while holding mission constant. Vision can be small or large, short term or long term, simple or sophisticated. A functioning vision provides energy, focus, and a sense of urgency. A vision enables us to prioritize our resources towards mission fulfillment – what should be done first, second, what should not be done, or left to do later?

Key understandings on Vision:

1. Vision produces energy.
2. Vision is best developed as three images – past, present, and future.
3. It is the gap between present and future that produces energy.
4. Both personal and shared visions are necessary. Neither are, by themselves, sufficient.

Core Values. In its essence, core values are “rules of engagement.” They are the answer to the question: “How are we going to behave, especially toward one another, as we pursue our visions and mission?” Even in wartime, there are agreed upon values governing how combatants are to engage one another. These values are called “rules of engagement.” What is permissible in pursuit of our visions and mission and what is not? In the organizational setting, core values govern how we will interact with each other, with colleagues, with students, families, with our environment and resources, and with external stakeholders.

Key understandings on Core Values:

1. Clear and commonly understood core values support better communication, higher job satisfaction, less conflict, and better teamwork.
2. Core values address how we view our time, resources, colleagues, clients, and communities.
3. Core values should be proactive, intentional, clear, written down, and practiced- with feedback.



Some ways to remember how the three key ingredients work together...

Mission is the why. Vision is the what. Core values are the how.

Life and work is a journey. On that journey, Mission is a compass, always pointing toward true North. Vision is a picture of the destination. We keep it in our pocket to clarify our direction and add motivation. Core values are our “rules of the road.” They tell us what’s in bound and what’s out of bounds as we travel.



“All things are created twice.”

Stephen R. Covey, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People



“We are either the second creation of our own proactive design or we are the second creation of other peoples’ agendas, of circumstances, or of past habits.”

Stephen R. Covey, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People