

# Leading with Vision

Vision, Mission, Core Values  
Toolkit for Founders and Teams

# Leading with Vision



## VISION

Your guiding star

Your vision conveys your organization's aims for how the world will change as a result of your efforts. It provides an understanding of your ultimate goals as an organization over the long term.



## MISSION

How you get there

Your mission articulates how you will achieve your aspirational, long-term goals. A mission centers the stakeholders for whom you create value and how (big activities or strategies), and can incorporate what you do for profit that will benefit people and the planet (your purpose). Your mission enables focus and alignment, so everyone knows what you're doing together.



## CORE VALUES

How you stay on track

Values are guiding principles for how your company is governed, functions and behaves. They articulate the key priorities that your company stands for internally and externally and serve as lenses to help guide both everyday and strategic decisions. Values that work best are authentic to your organization, and are practiced consistently across the company.

**Purpose:** The British Academy states, "The purpose of business is to solve the problems of people and planet profitably, and not profit from causing problems." Your mission, vision and values are opportunities to incorporate your purpose – what you do for profit that benefits a broad group of stakeholders.

# Your vision, mission and core values **form the foundation of your company.**

**It's never too early to start** — these concepts create a common understanding of where you are going, why, and how you intend to get there. Together, they inform everything from daily decisions to strategy and communications. In order for these foundational principles to function, they need to live every day — not just stored as words on a website. They must be meaningful and authentic, practicable and motivating, and that means the way they are developed is as important as the results.

The following exercises are designed to support founders and teams, from pre-seed on, in building a mission, vision and values that are alive. We start with your guiding star. This will serve as an anchor for building your mission and values. These exercises encourage discussion — therefore, it is important to budget adequate time to complete them and allow for additional conversation as needed. Depending on your company size, you may decide to complete the exercises in a half day retreat, or break them up into three 1.5 hour sessions. The time commitment depends on the size and complexity of the organization.

The toolkit also includes tips and resources to enrich the development and integration of your mission, vision and core values.

Have fun!

**Pre-seed and seed stage founders:** While some of the exercises suggest working with your team, they work well for one or two person teams to build your mission, vision and values into your DNA.

# Vision Exercise

A vision is a long-term picture of your company's aims for impacting the world.

1

Define the key stakeholders who will influence or be influenced by your company over the next ten years. To do this, consider: **Who are most important to your operations or your performance? Who views your impacts as significant to them?** Examples: employees, customers, suppliers, agencies, communities, and shareholders.

2

Engage with your key stakeholders to learn their responses to this question: **Imagine a time far in the future when our company has achieved its most aspirational goals. How would you describe what the world looks like as a result of our company's success?** Summarize how each group responds. If you are unable to engage stakeholders right now, consider various points of view as a thought exercise.

3

Based on data you've collected: **1) Highlight common themes and powerful images that evoke the future state your company aims for. Then, 2) consider which themes are the most aspirational, yet achievable.** Is there anything missing that you and your stakeholders believe is core to what you aim to achieve?

4

Now, write a draft vision statement describing your long-term aims. Simplify into two sentences or less. Finally, compare your statement with that of competitors. Is it authentic and meaningful within the context of your organization? You will return to this draft in the Mission Exercise.



Start by defining your organization's vision for the future in collaboration with stakeholders. This will be your 'Guiding Star' and will be influential in articulating your mission.

**Tip:** If you are engaging external stakeholders, you can share Step 2 of the Vision Exercise and Step 1 of the Mission Exercise together in your outreach.

# Mission Exercise

Your mission articulates how you will achieve your vision.

1

Ask your stakeholders: Imagine a time in the future when your company has achieved its long-term goals. Looking back, answer these questions:

- For whom did we create value (customers, users, etc.) and what did we do for them (big activities or strategies)?
- What did our company do for profit that made a positive difference for a broad group of stakeholders - people and the planet?

2

Consolidate information from stakeholders. Write a draft mission statement in three sentences or less. At this stage, consider gathering the team together to discuss your draft mission and vision. Focus the discussion on overlap and disagreement, what could be added or changed, and work towards your collective mission and vision for the company.

3

Based on the discussion, revise and then share the new vision and mission statements with your team and gather feedback: **Considering our core identity as a company, what would you change or add to make this new draft vision and mission stronger and more relevant to our aspirations as a company?**

4

Rewrite the mission and vision statements and complete a final round of feedback with key stakeholders.



Now that you've completed an initial draft of your vision, you are ready to consider how you'll go about achieving it. This exercise focuses on building your draft mission.

**Tip:** For a purpose-driven mission, place more weight on the responses to the second question in Step 1.

# Values Exercise

Core values are guiding principles for how your company functions and operates.

1

Ahead of the exercise, share the following prompts to unearth unique behaviors, practices and attributes to inform your core values. If all employees won't be participating in the exercise, designated team members can gather input from functional teams.

Think of a time when a colleague did something you admired at work. How would you describe what you admired about it?

Think of a time when you noticed people worked together in a way that resulted in accomplishing something extraordinary. How were they able to succeed together?

Consider a company that has accomplished great things. How would you describe their approach? Further, how would you describe your organization's unique approach?

What other key principles express what our company stands for internally and externally? Which should leadership and employees return to again and again to stay on track?



Gather the entire team or a group of team members across different functions to “Think-Pair-Share” and generate your core values.

# Values Exercise

continued

## 2

Now bring the team together after they have reviewed the prompts, for a “Think-Pair-Share” exercise.

1. Individual team members consider the four prompts and draft answers in as much detail as necessary.
2. Join into pairs to choose which responses in each category resonate as core company values for both participants.
3. Groups of four prioritize the top four core values of the team members present across the four categories.
4. The whole group discusses differences and overlap as a team. Once the team hones in on a prioritized set of values, consider the question: If we implemented these values to perfection, what would be missing?

## 3

Based on the group discussion write a balanced set of eight or fewer core values. A balanced set incorporates principles across all four prompts on page six and the values complement each other. For each value, include how your company uniquely defines it. Share a draft with the team for review and comment.

## 4

Rewrite your core values and descriptions based on the feedback. Complete a final round of feedback with the team. Finally, share your *working* vision, mission and core values with your stakeholders!

**Tip:** Create a shared workspace where individuals and groups can post their responses. Consider designating an individual or committee to organize responses into themes and facilitate the prioritization of an initial set of core values. This can be accomplished by voting, ranking, weighing pros and cons, etc.

# Integrating

What your company does, says and measures



What you **do**  
*How you build and manage your team, products and company*

Decision-making  
Policies and practices (e.g. recruiting, promotions, remuneration, norms)  
System of governance  
Product / service design



What you **say**  
*How you communicate your goals, beliefs, and competitive advantage*

Communications and brand  
Fundraising  
Company narrative and storytelling



What you **measure**  
*How you evaluate progress and alignment*

Outputs and outcomes related to your mission and vision (what you produce and what changes)  
Key Performance Indicators  
Values alignment

Your vision, mission and values are built into all aspects of your company. They enable your organization to function in society in a way that you are proud of. In order for this to be the case, these foundational concepts need to be integrated into what the organization *does, says and measures*.

In designing services or products, making difficult decisions, communicating your value proposition, or facilitating internal processes, team members can ask: **What would it look like if we were in alignment with our vision, mission, and values?**

“The most important question is, ‘how do you manage the gray areas?’ And, when you’re in the gray, what’s your guiding star? ... Would this decision align with our purpose, values, mission, way of doing business, reputation, and ultimately, how we want to be viewed?”

—Robin Washington, Board Member at Alphabet, Honeywell and Salesforce.com

# Resources

The Art of Gathering (Priya Parker)

Crucial Conversations (Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Al Switzler, Ron McMillan)

The Enacting Purpose Initiative Report #2 (Oxford, et al.)

Enacting Purpose within the Modern Corporation (Oxford, et al.)

Ethical OS

Founder Library

Measuring Purpose - An Integrated Framework (Impact Management Project, et al.)

Operationalizing Purpose (Obvious Ventures)

Principles for Purposeful Business (The British Academy)

## Get in touch

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