One Step Further: Finding Your Business's Purpose
Many business leaders with a clear competitive strategy also find value in bringing a strong sense of purpose to their company culture. While this might seem like a luxury, it is also central for laying the foundation for growth and customer loyalty.

Steve Yastrow, author of “Brand Harmony” and president of Yastrow and Co., a consultancy based in Deerfield, Illinois, explains that employees with a strong, shared belief in their company’s purpose will align their everyday actions with that purpose and, in turn, influence the customer experience. Experiences drive customers’ perceptions of a brand and their response to it. “So, what your employees believe and do has everything to do with everything in making money in business,” Yastrow says.

Somewhat paradoxically, though, a purpose establishes how a company makes the world a better place apart from making money, says Matthew Fenton, founder and president of Three Deuce Branding, a Chicago-based consulting firm. Fenton works with a midsize travel company that arranges performance trips for student groups. The company’s purpose is making moments that matter, and it seeks to practice that purpose with all of its clients. In addition to ensuring students enjoy themselves and parents know their children are safe, the company also prioritizes making the educators who run the trips feel valued.

“It considers itself a service company that happens to be in the student travel industry,” Fenton says, and that approach is working. “Music education budgets are being slashed, but the company has nearly tripled in size just in the last five years.”

When businesses focus on deepening customer connections through purpose, Fenton says, they don’t have to rely exclusively on features to differentiate themselves. A clear purpose also makes it easier to separate activities that support success from those that don’t and allows a company to operate more effectively. “You’re directing your limited resources of time, energy and money toward the same purpose all of the time,” he says. “Those resources build, and they become stronger.”

When determining their purpose, midsize companies have advantages over their larger competitors, Yastrow says. Less bureaucracy expedites the purpose-definition process, and with fewer employees, it’s easier to be sure that everyone is on the same page with the company’s mission. From there, translating the purpose into specific employee behaviors is essential. “Then, all employees are doing things all day long that add up to a unified customer experience,” Yastrow says.

“Consumers today want to do business with companies that have a purpose and have clear values. Purpose can provide a higher order type of connection with your customers.” — Matthew Fenton

The power of purpose extends to suppliers, too. “Customers are anybody outside the business whose actions affect your success,” Yastrow says. “If your purpose is focused on the impact you can have on those people and those businesses, they’re going to act in ways that improve your results, and you’re going to be much better off.”
5 Ways to Promote Your Company’s Purpose

Use this checklist to help spread your mission among your employees.

A company’s purpose, or mission, allows its employees to feel good about why they are getting up every morning and spending 40 hours (or more) at their job each week. However, according to Elizabeth Crook, CEO and founder of Orchard Advisors, some companies will “lose good employees because they haven’t found a way to articulate the company’s purpose in a way that is meaningful.”

Here are some tips for communicating your company’s purpose to all employees:

Three bricklayers were asked what they were doing:

The first answered, “I’m laying brick.”

The second answered, “I’m building a wall.”

The third answered, “I’m building a cathedral.”

Define yourselves

Clearly defining your purpose and your reason for existing helps ensure you will meet your goals and grow into the type of company you want to be. The simpler your purpose, the better. Whole Foods Market, which recently ranked on Fortune magazine’s “Change the World” list, runs by the motto, “Whole Foods, Whole People, Whole Planet.”

Talk the talk and walk the walk

Actions speak louder than words. If your company’s leadership team isn’t committed to the stated purpose, employees won’t be either and could quickly become cynical or head for the exits. Make sure executives are personally promoting a lifestyle that is congruent with the stated company purpose. Whole Foods co-founder and co-CEO John Mackey recently co-authored a book extolling the value of a business’s higher purpose and impact on the world.

Communicate perspective

Crook says it is critical to help every person in the organization understand that the work they do connects to something larger than themselves. Consider the story of the three bricklayers to instill perspective in your workforce.

Plan time to celebrate values

Each month, pick a value that’s key to your purpose—such as innovation, collaboration or integrity—to highlight in team meetings. You might also select an “employee of the month” who best exemplifies this value. This will keep the concept fresh in everyone’s mind and give all other employees a tangible example of what living that value looks like.

Use storytelling

Examples and experiences will resonate with the typical employee far more than facts and figures. Sharing examples of how your business is furthering its purpose (such as a list of charitable recipients) can emphasize company values throughout the enterprise and illustrate the full effect of your workforce’s efforts.

1Whole Foods Market makes Fortune’s ‘Change the World’ list, a ranking of ‘companies that are doing well by doing good.’ Aug. 20, 2015, Whole Foods Market Newsroom
How to Cultivate a Purpose-driven Business

Running your company with a larger purpose can help it succeed.

Purpose can be a key part of your competitive strategy, but you need to go beyond just simply establishing one. Employees and customers want to know why you believe in your purpose—beyond that it improves your bottom line. Businesses that can articulate, be authentic and help people connect with their purpose can attract valued employees, loyal customers and sustained success.

“Evidence is mounting that focusing on purpose rather than profits is what builds business confidence.”
— 2014 Deloitte Core Beliefs & Culture Survey

71% of consumers would help a brand promote its products or services if there was a good cause behind them

72% of consumers would recommend a brand that supports a good cause over one that doesn’t

73% of consumers would switch brands if a different brand of similar quality supported a good cause
Here are six key factors to consider in the pursuit of a higher purpose for your business:

**Do’s**

**Be authentic**
- An authentic connection between your brand’s actions and its purpose can boost customer loyalty (and even sales), as well as employee engagement.
- An inauthentic brand can lead to disloyalty, distrust and a decrease in sales.

**Hire the right people**
- Hiring people with a shared sense of purpose gives everyone in the company a common starting point.
- Employees who understand their company’s purpose and feel connected to the work they do are more engaged, more productive, less stressed and more likely to stay with a company long-term.

**Select and participate in a cause you care about**
- Refining your values to connect your company to a potential charity partner can strengthen your foundation.
- Surveying your customers to identify specific causes they support can show you care about what’s important to them.
- Identifying a cause that resonates with your employees can help inspire them and yield participation.

**Don’ts**

**Lose sight of your purpose**
- Companies that focus on sheer profit over purpose are less confident about their growth prospects.\(^2\)
- Effective companies keep their purpose on people’s minds and hearts by visibly and consistently demonstrating those behaviors.

**Administer your purpose-driven business alone**
- Bringing in experts, such as an advisory board, can increase your ability to achieve your business goals.
- Forming partnerships to support your purpose can set your company apart from competitors, increase brand recognition, open up new markets and improve relationships with the community and your customers.

**Forget to establish goals**
- Setting goals and expectations, such as hitting a specific financial amount, can help you create innovative business strategies.
- Implementing goals—and sticking to them—demonstrates the tangible results of your purpose strategy.

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