

mission statements, values and vision





“Turn left now”: GPS for your organisation

Are your mission statements meaningless words printed on a wall or guidance and positioning statements (GPS) that provide clarity and sense of purpose for all employees?

Nicholas Barnett investigates

MOST MISSION STATEMENTS – or statements of vision, mission and values or guidance and positioning statements (GPS) – are empty words that simply hang on a wall and have little connection with what employees do each day. Why is that the case? Why is there a disconnect between words and actions? How can it be different? How can GPS be brought to life? How can GPS be made to come alive so as to energise and focus the efforts of employees? How can your mission statements or GPS be truly regarded as guidance and positioning statements? That’s what this article will explain.

FABLE OF THE THREE BRICKLAYERS

The fable of the three bricklayers helps set the scene for this article.

William asked Bricklayer 1 what he was doing. Bricklayer 1 said, “What’s it to you?” to which William replied that he was carrying out a research study of bricklayers. Bricklayer 1 placed another brick on his wall and said, “Can’t you see what I am doing? I am putting one brick on top of another!” and continued with his work.

William, taking notes, then asked “And why are you doing that?” to which Bricklayer 1 replied, “It’s to feed my family. I get \$2 per brick,” as he added mortar and placed another brick on the wall.

William moved on to Bricklayer 2. He asked, “Excuse me, sir, please tell me what you are doing?” The bricklayer stood up and stretched his back and said, “Why, my workmates and I are great wall-builders. We are building a wall.”

William said, “Yes, I can see you are building a very good wall. Why are you doing that?” The bricklayer, reaching down with his left hand to pick up another brick, said, “My workmates and I are great wall-builders and we enjoy building walls. We actually earn \$2 per brick, which is pretty good pay around here.”

William walked to the third building site and saw a bricklayer who also looked just like the first two bricklayers. William said to Bricklayer 3, “Excuse me sir, what are you doing there?” Bricklayer 3 said, “Why, I am part of a team that builds the best cathedrals in the land. My workmates and I build the walls for those cathedrals. The walls are probably the most important part of the cathedral, as they hold up what is a quite complex structure.”

William was somewhat taken aback and said, “Well, congratulations, you are certainly well progressed with what will no doubt be a fabulous cathedral. So why are you doing that?”

Bricklayer 3 pushed out his chest and said, “I am proud to be working for one of the best, if not the single best builder of cathedrals in the country and I enjoy coming to work each day, being with my workmates and working with the other construction workers.” He went on to say, “I am treated and paid well. I earn \$2 per brick.”

LEADERSHIP, MESSAGING AND CULTURE

Is the difference between the outlook of Bricklayer 1 and Bricklayer 3 due mainly to a difference in their personalities and their general outlook on life? Or is it

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due to a difference in their leadership, the messages they receive and the culture of their organisation?

While some might agree that part of the difference may be due to the personality and general outlook of the individual bricklayers, all would agree that the major difference is almost certainly due to the organisation's leadership, messaging and culture.

Leadership is all about going somewhere and having something worthwhile to serve. If leaders can't articulate and gain buy-in to a clear and compelling aspiration, purpose, goals and values their leadership is irrelevant; it matters little.

The leader of Bricklayer 3 had articulated and gained buy-in to the inspiring long term direction and purpose of building the best cathedrals in the country.

FOUR STEPS TO DEVELOPING CATHEDRAL BUILDERS (AND BRICKLAYER 3S)

If leaders want their employees to take on the perspective of cathedral builders as opposed to those that simply put one brick on top of the other they need to understand, buy into and follow the following four steps:

1. Understand the importance and power of an inspiring GPS and genuinely buy into the process without treating it as a quick fix employee motivational exercise

2. Ensure that the company's vision for a compelling future is shared by all employees and it's not just the leader's vision
3. Gain an emotional buy-in to the organisation's GPS that is far more powerful in energising, inspiring and focusing employees than rational reasons alone
4. Embed and integrate the GPS developed with your employees into all the organisation's plans, projects, decisions, culture and messaging so that it becomes your employee's way of life.

1 The importance and power of an inspiring GPS

Many leaders simply believe the development of GPS is a good, quick fix employee motivational exercise. They have been in organisations where this is what was done before so they repeat the process without understanding the real purpose of an effective GPS. They don't understand the important connection between the GPS and the organisation's plans, decisions, culture and messaging.

A small number of leaders, however, understand the importance of an effective GPS, how it should be positioned and what it can achieve.

BHP Billiton includes its GPS in what it calls its Charter, on its website. It's been there, largely unaltered





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for over 12 years and has outlasted four CEOs. BHP Billiton must have tens of millions of very important documents in dozens of countries. They say their Charter is the “single most important means by which we communicate who we are, what we do, and what we stand for as an organisation, and it is the basis for our decision-making”.

BlueScope Steel refers to its vision and values as its Bond. It’s also on its website for all to see. It says, “Our Bond – the company charter of BlueScope Steel – expresses the principles that serve to guide our decisions and actions”.

Insync Surveys, a company associated with the writer, states on its website that its “vision, mission and values are what we call our Guidance and Positioning Statements (GPS). They describe:

- who we are
- where we’re going and why
- the values that we abide by, and
- why we are different

Our GPS guides all our plans, decisions and messaging and is the foundation for our strategic and business plans. The core values included in our GPS are our organisation’s way of life. We embrace, reinforce and live

by them to succeed, to overcome challenges, lead change and evolve. Our values form and shape our organisation’s culture and DNA and make us distinctively Insync Surveys”.

Understanding the importance of an effective GPS, how it should be positioned and what it can achieve is a great foundation upon which to build your cathedral!

2 It’s not just the leader’s vision, mission and values

A vision of a compelling future, a meaningful purpose and core values that are developed with the engagement of all employees or a good cross section thereof are meant to die for!

However, it’s much quicker and easier for a leader to come up with their own GPS or create a GPS that has input from only a small number of people. Involving many others takes a whole lot more energy, effort and time of not only the leader but of their employees too. That involves a significant cost that some will rightly see as a very valuable investment whilst others will see as a big expense in both time and money.

Engaging multiple employees in the process, from different areas of the organisation, requires being open to diverse perspectives. Leaders traditionally are not good at doing this as to do so requires them to give up a level of

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control and adds uncertainty to the outcome. Great leaders, however, are still able to hold the reins but genuinely listen and take account of other perspectives. Their employees are far more likely to be engaged, energised and focused on seeing that vision brought to reality if they were involved in its development. They will be far more able to see the big picture and more likely to work with their colleagues to build great cathedrals.

3 Emotional or just rational buy-in?

Gaining buy-in involves engaging both the head and the heart; the rational and the emotional.

Most leaders have a very strong left-brain orientation. They are structured and systematic thinkers and often highly intelligent. They are good at arguing and debating the merits of a proposal. They use their head but rarely use their heart.

Great leaders also achieve an emotional connection with their employees. They go much deeper and connect with the heart. They are able to identify those things that will provide meaning and fulfilment for employees that also have a positive flow on to productivity. They are more likely to attract and develop Bricklayer 3s and cathedral builders than leaders that simply engage the rational mind.



“Leadership is all about going **somewhere** and having something **worthwhile** to serve

—NICHOLAS BARNETT

This is particularly important when it comes to expressing the organisation’s core purpose or its reason for being. Too many organisations simply say that their purpose is to make lots of money for their shareholders. They rarely take the time and effort to discover and articulate the meaningful and nobler purpose that will create a deeper connection and greater fulfilment for

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their employees and other stakeholders. Employees that are engaged emotionally will be passionate about building the very best cathedrals. They won't consider their role as simply to place one brick on top of another.

4 Embedding and integrating your shared GPS


The ultimate objective is to embed and integrate the GPS you developed with your employees into your organisation's culture and DNA. This will make it part of the everyday language and thinking of your employees and will ensure that all your plans, projects, decisions, actions, behaviours and messaging are aligned with and easily linked to your GPS.

This takes a significant effort and commitment from your leadership team. Your GPS needs to be even more at the top of their minds than for other employees. Once they get in the rhythm, it will become part of the way they think and act and a normal part of their messaging.

Embedding your GPS will require changes and updates to your organisation's systems and processes, including your induction, recognition and performance management systems.

Every reasonable opportunity should be taken by management to relate current projects, plans and decisions back to your organisation's GPS. This will

involve management explaining why the particular projects and plans are essential if the organisation's Vision is to be achieved. Explanations of progress made over the last two or three years towards your Vision, the main goals and an explanation as to what needs to be done over the next few quarters or year brings a bigger picture perspective to daily actions and achievements.

The real test of whether you have achieved steps one to four and embedded an effective GPS will come when your employees voluntarily and proudly describe themselves as cathedral builders and not simply as bricklayers. Organisations can measure this regularly by conducting an employee alignment and engagement survey to determine whether the organisation has a clear GPS, whether everyday actions of employees are aligned with that GPS and the extent to which employees are engaged. 

About GPS for your Organisation

"GPS for your Organisation: how to energise your employees and build sustainable high performance" is a practical guide to help company boards, CEOs and leadership teams add clarity and gain ongoing buy-in to their organisation's long-term direction, purpose and values. It will also add focus and urgency to their strategic and business plans.

"GPS for your Organisation" by Nicholas Barratt is published by Major Street Publishing \$29.95 or e-book \$19.95





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