

CORPORATE CONSTITUTIONS

A written corporate constitution can be a priceless document for both individuals and organizations. As Thomas Jefferson said about the Constitution of the United States: "Our peculiar security is in the possession of a written Constitution."

Mission statements, whether personal or corporate in scope, empower people to take control of their lives and thereby gain more internal security.

In writing a mission statement, you are drafting a blueprint, raising a standard, cementing a constitution. The project deserves broad involvement. In my experience, every company that has conscientiously involved their people in formulating a mission statement, has produced a fine constitution. The principle is basic to many societies: govern (manage) by the consent of the people. People have a sense of what is right, and, if involved, will come up with a noble document.

For example, at the Pillsbury Company—a fast-growth, diversified corporation that grew from 40,000 to 100,00 employees in the last decade—executives woke up one day with "the uneasy feeling that our concern with financial goals in the 1970's had come at the expense of helping our people adapt to the dramatic growth of the company. We decided there had to be some statement, a public declaration of what Pillsbury should

stand for. It would have to be simple, short, give people permission to dream, take risks and think creatively and signal a change in our culture from conservative, cumbersome and bureaucratic to people-oriented, innovative and supportive of individual initiative."

Pillsbury took one year and involved their top 200 managers with participation throughout the company to create a one-page constitution, their mission and values statement.

And what difference has it made? Reports Virginia Ward, vice president of Human Resources, "We now feel a

sense of orientation, being, purpose. It prevents being distracted and sidetracked. It also focuses your personal energies and resources. You don't spend time and money and effort on things that don't return and aren't related to your reason for being.

Use your mission statement to direct and unify your life or organization. You build more internal security by being more self-directed. If you build your own security around the weaknesses of others, you allow their weaknesses to control you. If you

build on weaknesses of your competitors, you actually empower them. On the other hand, if you operate from your own statement of mission and values, your life is not so buffeted by external forces. In fact, your focus will begin to shape the events of your life.

The mission statement becomes a framework for thinking, for governing. Review it periodically and ask, "Are we doing the best we can to live by this? Are we preventing problems?" Management by quick fix leads to management by crises. Crises come one after another just like a pounding surf. Troubles come so frequently that life begins to blend into one huge problem. Cynicism and fatigue set in.

For example, we once worked with a business that wanted to create cost-consciousness. So they put on a drive, and everyone became cost-

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sense of ownership throughout the company for our mission and values. We are more effective in our management of people because of the principles inherent in our mission and values. There is a spirit of optimism and excitement about the future."

Such is the power of a corporate constitution. Most corporate mission statements assume there is a basic morality, integrity, and sense of social responsibility in people.

A mission statement focuses your

conscious and forgot new business. Then the new drive was to get new business. Everyone went out to get new business and neglected internal relationships. The next frantic drive was human relations. One drive followed another. Cynicism became pervasive until people would no longer support a drive. Their energies were diverted into politicking, polarizing, and protecting turf.

This can also happen in families. Too many families are managed on the basis of quick fix, instant gratification, not on sound principles and rich emotional bank accounts. Then, when stress and pressure mount, people start yelling, over-reacting, or being cynical, critical or silent. Children see it and think this is the way you solve problems — either fight or flight. And the cycle can be passed on for generations.

This is why we recommend that you have a family mission statement as well. By drafting a family constitution, you are getting to the root of the problem. If you want to get anywhere long-term, identify core values and goals and get the system aligned with these values and goals. Work on the foundation. Make it secure. The core of

any family is what is changeless, what is always going to be there. This can be represented in a family mission statement. Ask yourself, "What do we value? What is our family all about? What do we stand for? What is our essential mission, our reason for being?" If you identify your essential purpose and set up shared vision and values, you can be successful with any situation that comes along. The mission excites people. It gets them to deal with problems and to talk them through in a mature and reasonable way, rather than fight or flight. If there is a dream, a mission, a vision, it will permeate that organization and shape its actions.

Principles are timeless, universal

laws that empower people. Individuals who think in terms of principles think of many applications and are empowered to solve problems under a myriad of different conditions and circumstances. On the other hand, people who think in terms of practices tend to be limited in effectiveness to specific conditions under which the practice is effective.

Principles have infinite applications, as varied as circumstances. They tend to be self-validating, self-evident, universal truths. When we start to recognize a correct principle, it becomes so familiar to us, it is almost like "common sense." The danger is that we may cast it off early instead of looking deeply

identity, some compelling mission, they accomplish far less than they might. To accomplish things based on objectives is not enough. To unleash the productivity in an organization, the focus needs to be on, not only what do you want to do, but what do you want to be. Thus, the corporate constitution deals with the questions of why.

For example, our firm has done some work with Walt Disney Imagineering. Initially, of course, Walt was the catalyst for the whole Disney organization. Since his death over 20 years ago, the Disney Corporation has worked to complete his ambitious dream, the Epcot Center.

After completing the center, the production and design team went from 2,200 engineers, artist and technicians to around 500. Morale was low.

To create new growth a group prepared a mission statement for the company, but few bought into it because they weren't involved. They then began a several-month process of writing a mission statement, involving all levels of the organization. Today they are motivated by a new mission. The spirit of the

new Disney approach is: "We seek not to imitate the masters; rather, we seek what they sought." Clearly this was needed to move forward.

A corporate mission statement provides meaning for the enterprise. Meaning is the challenging need of the modern worker. It's not enough to work to eat or stay on the job because you're treated well. Nor is it enough to have an opportunity to contribute your talents and to unleash some of your potential. People want to know why. Meaning is the essential ingredient in modern times to organizational success.

How to Write Your Own Constitution

There are some specific steps in-

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into how the specific principle may be valuable in our current circumstance.

This can be easily seen when we talk about the principles involved in developing personal and corporate "constitutions." There are certain underlying principles which are applied whether in the life of an individual or of an organization. Processes grow out of principles and give life to principles.

A mission statement helps people achieve success because it answers key questions like, "What do I want to do? What do I want to be?" Becoming the kind of person you want to be and doing the things that you desire to do actually define success.

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dividuals and companies must go through in developing a constitution: first, expand perspective; second, clarify values; third, test it against yourself or your organization; and fourth, test yourself or your organization against it.

Expand perspective. We become so involved, both individually and organizationally, with the day-to-day preparations of life that it's usually necessary to stand back to gain or expand perspective and remind ourselves what really matters.

These "perspective experiences" may be planned or unplanned. Unplanned experiences may include the death of a loved one, a severe illness, a financial setback, or extreme adversity. At such times, we stand back and look at our lives and try to ask ourselves some hard questions. What do we consider to be really important? Why are we doing what we're doing? If we didn't have to do what we do to get money, what would we do? Through this self-evaluation process, we tend to expand our perspective.

Proactive people can expand their perspective through such planned experiences as gathering the views of others involved in the organization or situation. They start contemplating, "What is most important to the organization? What contribution can we make? What is the meaning of what we do? What are we about? What do we want to be? What do we want to do? The many views expand perspective. As individuals search for the best within them and the best within the organization, real synergy takes place. Synergy is the process of valuing the differences and creating the best possible solution.

"Management by wandering around," a common practice at Hewlett Packard, is another good way to expand views on the organization.

Often people are reluctant to provide much open information because they do not feel part of the governing body of the organization; they question whether their values or their views are really needed or appreciated; or they feel at risk in sharing those views. One way to overcome this reluctance is to put together some questions and have "buzz groups" discuss them and submit their findings. Those can be compiled, considered, and responded to. When people see that what they contribute is taken seriously, they tend to want to contribute more.

And, when individual values are harmonized with those of the organization, people work together for common purposes that are deeply felt. They contribute more as a team than they would individually. Productivity doesn't just get a little better, it gets dramatically better.

This process of expanding perspective, of gathering the views of others, and trying to get a handle on what is the best, highest, and noblest within the organization, is a process that should not be rushed. It takes time, several months in a large organization.

Clarify values. After perspectives have been expanded and many new views contemplated, some individuals need to be charged with the responsibility to write a draft of an organizational mission statement, taking into account what has been gathered, and seen, and shared so far.

This draft then needs to be sent back to the members of the organization, with the caption, "We don't like it either." It is the exact wording that

clarifies and gives tremendous focus to the mission statement. One that is not well defined and refined will not be as valuable and useful in decision making. The best mission statements are the result of people coming together in a spirit of mutual respect, expressing their different views, and working together to create something greater than any one individual could do alone.

Test it against yourself or your organization. Take a more final draft of the mission statement or constitution and test it by asking, "Is this in harmony with my values, with the things that motivate me? Does it capture the heart and soul of the company? Does it represent the best within the organization?"

Think of the constitution in terms of two overlapping circles. One circle can represent the value system of the organization and the other circle can represent the value system of individuals. The more the circles of the individuals and the organization overlap, the more effective the organization tends to become. The mission statement needs to be tested for fit.

Test yourself or your organization against it. After the mission statement has been through this process, most people now need a chance to live with it for a while and to test the organization against it. Since these shared values are the heart and soul of the company, all policies, programs, strategies, structure and systems should be in harmony with them.

Over time, this process of writing and refining a mission statement becomes a key way to improve the organization. You do it periodically to expand perspective, shift emphasis or direction, amend or give new meaning to time-worn phrases.

By having a constitution, you have continuity. This is one of the

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