

## Putting Purpose First

We begin to tap the power of purpose in an organization when we discern what purpose is, and what it is not.

### ***What Purpose Is Not***

Purpose is not a goal, and purpose is not a mission, vision, or set of values, although the broadly embodied values of an ethical organization can be the soil in which purpose grows. And purpose is certainly not about profit (an important by-product of purposeful companies), corporate governance, or company principles.

Purpose is not a sales idea, or a marketing idea, or a regional idea, it is a company idea. Purpose answers why you do what you do, at the deepest level.

Purpose is never created, designed, or analyzed, it is discovered. Not every company has a purpose, but all great companies do.

### ***What Purpose Is***

Purpose is the deep impulse to make a life-affirming difference in the world. Purpose is an animating idea that flows through everything and everyone in an organization. Purpose is the “moral DNA” of a culture. Purpose answers the questions: Why do we do what we do? Why does our company exist? Purpose lives and breathes within a given culture, and is therefore felt by all the stakeholders of a community - employees, vendors, partners, and customers.

By contrast, mission is the core strategy (business model) employed to achieve the purpose. Vision is a visual conception, a picture of the purpose fulfilled within a reasonable timeframe. Purpose is primary. A deep and enduring purpose does not change, although everything else may. It is the unchanging “north star” that directs and informs everything. Given the high levels of complexity, relentless and rapid change, and accelerating technological and scientific advancement driving our global economy, we think it wise to keep things simple. We believe putting *purpose first* ignites an organization to its full capacity.

A wonderful recent example of putting purpose first emerged when the airlines in America decided to start charging fees for passenger bags. Southwest Airlines, a great company with an abiding purpose, “to give people the freedom to fly,” chose to do right by their powerful purpose, not only by not charging for baggage like all the other airlines did, but by introducing a humorous television campaign that made fun of the other airlines for doing so. Great companies use purpose as the lens they look through to make every business decision.

### ***Why We Discover Purpose***

Typically, consultants are called in to do purpose work with an organization when morale is low, a new Chief Executive Officer has been appointed, one culture is merging with another culture, a leadership team is in trouble, or a new core strategy is being considered. But the driver may simply be an organization’s desire to fulfill its full and true potential.

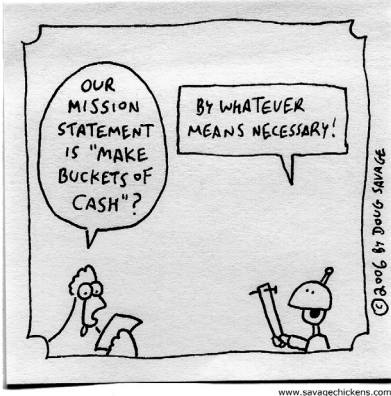
Many people tend to spend over forty per cent of their waking hours working. Recent research indicates that an abiding and deep purpose (a clear sense of

As management theorist Peter Drucker noted in his classic book, *The Practice of Management*,

*“If you want to know what a business is, we have to start with purpose. And its purpose must lie outside of the business itself. In fact, it must lie in society since a business enterprise is an organ of society.... Profit is not the explanation, cause or rationale of business behavior and business decisions, but the test of their validity.”*

*Savage Chickens*

by Doug Savage



“Purpose is the morale DNA of an organization.”

Nikos Mourkogiannis

why you do what you do) along with inner peace, connection, and challenging performance goals are what motivates 21st century employees. Throughout history, most high-performing people have dedicated themselves to a cause larger than themselves. Companies and leaders who make this insight actionable in the heads, hearts, and guts of their people will flourish; those who don't will be left in the dark.

The benefits of putting purpose first are many:

- Purpose holds you steady in a turbulent marketplace
- Purpose energizes the mind, body and spirit of an organization’s culture
- Purpose leads to inspired performance and inner peace
- Purpose helps you recruit passionate people
- Purpose fosters innovation and visionary ideas
- Purpose makes decision making easier

### **How We Discover Purpose**

There many ways to discover purpose: speak with the founders of an organization; evaluate success stories; probe for seed phrases in a culture’s language; mine failures for repressed purpose; till the soil for deeply embodied corporate values; seek and discern what meaning lies behind company symbols; reveal purpose by distilling a powerful and abiding brand essence; work with a senior leadership team; and finally, engage the “best of the best” in your company, usually the global hi-potential employees. Each of these methodologies can work to discover purpose. Each has it pluses and minuses. To discover purpose participants will have to feel as deeply as they think. Ultimately, the best way to discover purpose is the one that fits best with the culture of the organization at a given moment in time.

Several guidelines help us discover how we convey purpose.

Purpose:

- Is primary, and does not change
- Is unassailable and innate to a particular organization
- Aligns and informs business strategy
- Informs, animates, flows through *all domains* of the business
- Conveys a tone one of service
- Is expressed – typically - in five or less words
- Includes one word that is an action verb
- Is crystal clear, and easy to remember

Companies that have discovered purpose include a construction company, “To build lasting futures,” a technology company, “To simplify with confidence,” an entertainment company, “to bring happiness to millions,” a retail company, “To save people money so they can live better,” and an engineering company, “To help people discover things better.”