



PURPOSE, MISSION AND VISION

The Heart and Soul of The Non-Profit Organization

by David G. Lindstrom, Executive Vice President

Remember in Psych 101 when you learned the difference between a neurotic and a psychotic? A neurotic builds castles in the sky and a psychotic lives in them? The difference between purpose and mission is kind of like that.

The formal organizational statement of purpose is commonly the historic reason the organization was started in the first place. Organizations may change their statement of purpose when they wish to or are forced to change direction, but surprisingly few do. Worse, many organizations are known for their “old” purpose when they may be doing very meaningful work in quite different or expanded directions than the original purpose might suggest.

Mission is living in the castle in the sky, but, hopefully, it’s in process of being brought to ground. My definition of a MISSION IS A SHORT (one paragraph) DESCRIPTION OF WHAT THE ORGANIZATION LOOKS LIKE WHEN IT IS DOING ITS BEST JOB.

Having a recently-reviewed mission statement, agreed to and understood by board and staff alike, is essential to a good marketing plan. And a good marketing plan is essential to good fundraising.

An organizational vision is usually formulated by a founder or CEO and may be an underlying "guiding light" for the organization either short-term or long-term. It is rarely formally expressed, except it may be articulated in an organization's mission statement.

An organizational vision is commonly carried by an individual as a dream-like vignette and is shared as a story. Vision is formed from experience, need, and fascination. The more extensive the experience, the more intimate and broad the awareness of need and the more insistent the fascination, the brighter the vision. A powerful vision only becomes real when the person who "visions" has persistence, staying power, and the ability to communicate the vision to people with very differing ideas about what the mission of the organization "should" be.

The preceding remarks were developed by David G. Lindstrom, Executive Vice President of Jeffrey Byrne & Associates, for a talk before the Memphis Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals’ “Fundraising Day.” Dave credits his wife and partner,

Judith Drescher, who is Director of the Memphis/Shelby County Library System for her insight on organizational vision. Dave and Judy share a common vision of helping nonprofits in both their work and volunteer commitments. For more information on organizational planning, contact Jeffrey Byrne & Associates, Inc., at 1-800-222-9233, or visit us on the web at www.jeffreybyrneandassociates.com.