



## The Power of Purpose *by Patrick Hehir 2019*

### *The 10 Characteristics of a Great Purpose Statement:*

Corporate Execs that understand and leverage the power of purpose, usually deliver industry leading business performance. Purpose and meaning are tied to the heart, soul and passion of everyone, regardless of profession. People will 'give up' or 'suffer' a lot, to achieve things that matter to them or that are aligned with their interests and talents. People can easily become despondent if they do not find something of significance or worthwhile for themselves in their lives. But when they can and DO find meaning *at work* (where most people look for it), the way people bring their energy and full selves to that work, is difficult to ignore and impossible to compete with.

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As simple as this sounds, a powerful purpose is a key and often undervalued ingredient of business success.

### What is Purpose?

A great company purpose is the why or reason an organization exists. It provides the context for people to connect with and understand the vision behind what they do. Hence leaders ought to invest significant effort to bring clarity to the *Purpose* statement. In the early stages of a company's development, this is rarely necessary, as founders usually speak in such a way that people feel and *understand the why*. But as a company grows, leaders struggle to stay connected with the employees to the same degree. Distance grows between execs and employees, while new employees simply follow the crowd. A powerful purpose statement supported with good core values and a strong culture, helps fill organizational gaps in power distance and vision understanding.

To have ANY chance of achieving a purpose long term, leaders need to be authentically engaged and make their decisions while behaving in congruence with the values and the culture. When this occurs, the business then has the chance of benefiting from motivated employees' ideas, efforts and contributions.

This concept is not profound. Yet CEOs and other leaders, often undervalue the power of purpose, values and culture, as well as their role in keeping them real. CEO hubris often blocks them from seeing the value. Without purpose, companies lose direction, politics begin, engagement drops, and performance suffers. Those negative outcomes are preventable. The short list below may help you test your purpose and culture to see if it needs work.

### 10 Characteristics of a Great Purpose:

1. **The Why:** It clearly explains the reason or the **why**, the company exists. "In order to: ....."
2. **Directs:** It helps to provide unambiguous **direction** and aids decision making about **what** to do and what not to do. People often refer to it as like a north star or compass.
3. **Pulls:** It pulls the people (and the Org) to something that is **bigger and greater than themselves**.
4. **Brief:** The best purpose statements are brief. They are easy to *remember, understand and explain*. E.g. **Lego** - To inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow. **Harley Davidson** – To fulfill dreams through the experiences of motorcycling **Patagonia** – To save our home planet.
5. **Inspires:** It can **stir the heart**, minds and souls of ALL stakeholders, including customers.
6. **Aligns:** It accelerates people's **ability to become aligned** when discussing options or debating alternate courses of action. Debate is vital in a culture that is alive, and purpose provides oxygen.
7. **Anchors the Brand:** A powerful purpose statement is the anchor to a company's **Brand Identity**. Marketing and messaging in general, becomes infinitely easier when there is deep exploratory or searching work done to uncover the ONE core reason that the company exists.
8. **Aspirational:** It takes a lot of work to get it right, is **never reached** and can last for decades.
9. **Money:** Most purposes have little or **nothing to do with money**. Yet ironically it is a foundational element to helping a company achieve great success including delivering **financial rewards**.
10. **Authentic and Alive:** Must be **REAL** and KEPT alive. Needs to be an integrated part of the Culture and management system by being tethered to the company Values that are nurtured and cared for.