

MISSION WITHOUT A CAUSE

While many mission statements represent significant collaborative efforts in focusing organizational direction, expectations for ongoing impact upon employee behavior and market appeal are rarely met. Perhaps these messages of corporate commitment to customer priority have become so routine as to immunize those intended to be influenced. Further, mission exercises inspired in the executive suite and shaped by PR professionals suffer from the suggestion of ulterior motive. Thus, initial flurries of enthusiasm, even those generated by broad employee participation, are deceiving and soon dissipated by ingrained work habits and organizational routine. Fresh behavioral mandates cannot overcome the momentum of job descriptions rooted in tasks to be performed, not in missions to be undertaken. And so, missions directed to the marketplace can be overwhelmed by assignments in the workplace.

Furthermore, management's capacity to provide sustaining thrust to a mission commitment is hobbled by pre-occupation as customers, competitors and predators set ever changing corporate priorities. CEOs live by the day, where strategic planning is abandoned in favor of alternative reacting. Missions die by the day as employee and customer expectations are gradually starved.

Ultimately missions fail for lack of a cause, for only a sense of compelling purpose can rally genuinely motivated producers and consumers. Yet, managers in search of a cause will find their efforts frustrated by the newness of the territory where nearly every social economic and business staple is undergoing abrupt and dramatic transformation, presenting new sets of questions in the survival lesson:

- Can a cause unite the interests of shareholder and customer when those interests frequently collide?
- Can a cause involve an undertaking unrelated to an organization's core business and still deliver premium returns to both owners and customers?
- Why does a cause have sustaining impact upon employee behavior when a mission need not?
- Why can you have a mission without a cause but cannot have a cause without a mission?
- If the present competitive climate is so unforgiving of executive misjudgment, is it too risky for corporate leaders to venture from their traditional agenda into largely uncharted areas of citizenship?

In answering these questions tomorrow's business leaders will address their predicament, refusing to be victimized by it, knowing that consumers keep their own score on corporate behavior, searching for quality, trustworthiness and genuine caring. They reject exploitation by self-serving corporate "missions," exacerbated by inept communications on merger and acquisition strategy.

Tomorrow's business leaders will have learned that shareholder value is a function of market attitude toward the corporate label with enlightened citizenship a shaping priority. They re-allocate resources to customer satisfaction and public good, finding their CAUSE in the combination.