

Creating Your Personal Mission Statement

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Purpose: The personal mission statement will be the first component of your skills portfolio. It can serve as a guide for you as you look at job opportunities and career aspirations. Your mission statement should inspire you! You may wish to include it on your résumé to give employers a sense of your goals in work and life, but primarily it is for **you**. Several recent books (e.g., Covey et al, 1994 and Jones, 1996) have described mission statements as a self-assessment tool to help individuals with career planning and day-to-day decision-making.

Please note that personal mission statements are dynamic. As you change roles, jobs, and interests you would likely write different mission statements.

Format/ Style: Mission statements come in various forms. They have been used by organizations for years. Businesses try to keep their mission statements brief and “catchy” so that they will be remembered by customers and can be used in advertising, e.g., GE’s *We bring good things to life*” and Acura’s: *Designed with purpose. Driven by passion.*

Others are quite long, detailing the different facets of the organization. There are alternative terms used for mission statements, such as “vision statements” and “purpose statements.”

“The University of Guelph is renowned in Canada and around the world as a research-intensive and learner-centred institution and for its commitment to open learning, internationalism and collaboration.

“Our vision is to be Canada’s leader in creating, transmitting and applying knowledge to improve the social, cultural and economic quality of life of people in Canada and around the world.” <http://www.uoguelph.ca/>

There are three styles: (1) single sentence, (2) paragraph or two, or (3) a list of objectives, e.g., I will..., I will.....

Laurie Beth Jones (1996, p. 3) advocates the **single sentence style**. “There are three simple elements to a good mission statement:

1. A mission statement should be no more than a single sentence long.
2. It should be easily understood by a twelve year old.
3. It should be able to be recited by *memory* at gunpoint.”

She continues: “The truth is that all great leaders in history have had missions that were no longer than one sentence long. Abraham Lincoln’s mission was to preserve the Union. FDR’s was to end the Depression. Nelson Mandela’s mission was to end apartheid. Mother Teresa’s mission is [was] to show mercy and compassion to the dying. Joan of Arc’s mission was to free France. Nehemiah’s mission was to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem” (pp. 3-4). Jones’ own mission statement is: “To recognize, promote and inspire the divine connection in myself and others” (p. 222). She outlines four steps to creating your own mission statement:

Step 1. Every Mission Statement requires action. Action words are verbs. Write down three action verbs that are meaningful to you (from the attached “Action Verbs” list or pp. 50-57 of *The Path*).

Step 2. What do you stand for? What principle, cause, value, or purpose would you be willing to devote your life to? What is your core? Write down the word or phrase. Some examples: joy, service, justice, family, creativity, freedom, equality, faith, excellence (p. 58). You may also wish to use Ted Robert’s attached list of “Values.”

Step 3. Whom are you here to help? Write down up to three. For example: elderly, environment, family, education, youth, children, poor, homeless, literacy, labour relations, performing arts (Pp. 59-63); other examples: volunteers, workers, people with cancer or other chronic diseases.

Step 4. Put it together (p. 63)...

My mission is to(Your three verbs), (Your core value), To, for or with....(the group(s) or cause).

Here are some examples developed using this technique:

- “To promote safety, well-being, and self-esteem for all children.” - student in SOAN 432.
- “I will live each day with respect for myself and others, facing challenges as they come and learning from my mistakes in order to become a stronger person.” - student in SOAN 432.
- “To inhale every sunrise, and look under every rock for the joy life has to offer.” -woman who works in a cancer care centre (p. 67 of *The Path*).

NOTE: This technique does not work for everyone – try it and see if it is helpful. If not, then do some journalling and explore different ideas, or go for a walk in the woods or on a beach and let your mind wander! And/ or consider the following...

According to Covey, Merrill, and Merrill (1994, p. 113), “An empowering mission statement:

1. represents the deepest and best within you. It comes out of a solid connection with your deep inner life.
2. is the fulfilment of your own unique gifts. It’s the expression of your unique capacity to contribute.
3. is transcendent. It’s based on principles of contribution and purpose higher than self.
4. addresses and integrates all four fundamental human needs and capacities. It includes fulfilment in physical, social, mental, and spiritual dimensions. [“To live, to love, to learn, to leave a legacy”]
5. is based on principles that produce quality-of-life results...
6. deals with both vision and principle-based values...An empowering mission statement deals with both character and competence; **what you want to be and what you want to do in your life.**
7. deals with all the significant roles in your life. It represents a lifetime balance of personal, family, work, community – whatever roles you feel are yours to fill.
8. **is written to inspire you – not to impress anyone else.** It communicates to you and inspires you on the most essential level.” [bold added]

Mission statements given as examples by Covey et al (pp. 318-321) are usually one paragraph, here’s the first example that they list:

“Climb the mountain: I will live each day with courage and a belief in myself and others. I will live by the values of integrity, freedom of choice, and a love of all God’s people. I will strive to keep commitments not only to others but to myself as well. I will remember that to truly live, I must climb the mountain today for tomorrow may be too late. I know that my mountain may seem no more than a hill to others and I accept that. I will be renewed by my own personal victories and triumphs no matter how small. I will continue to make my own choices and to live with them as I have always done. I will not make excuses or blame others. I will, for as long as possible, keep my mind and body healthy and strong so that I am able to make the choice to climb the mountain. I will help others as best I can and I will thank those who help me along the way.”

References

- Covey, Stephen R., Merrill, A. Roger, and Merrill, Rebecca R. *First Things First: To Live, To Love, To Learn, To Leave a Legacy* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994.
- Jones, Laurie Beth. *The Path: Creating Your Mission Statement for Work and for Life*. New York: Hyperion, 1996.

Action Verbs¹

accomplish	adopt	advance	affect	affirm
alleviate	appreciate	believe	brighten	build
cause	choose	compel	complete	compose
confirm	connect	create	defend	delight
deliver	demonstrate	direct	discover	dream
educate	embrace	encourage	enlighten	excite
explore	facilitate	forgive	foster	generate
give	heal	implement	improve	inspire
involve	launch	mediate	model	motivate
nurture	open	organize	participate	perform
practice	praise	prepare	produce	promote
provide	pursue	realize	receive	reclaim
reflect	reform	remember	revise	sacrifice
safeguard	save	serve	share	speak
stand	support	surrender	sustain	take
travel	team	touch	travel	understand
use	utilize	validate	value	volunteer
work	worship	write	yield	

¹ The "Action Verbs" list was abstracted by Ted Roberts from Jones' *The Path*.

Values²

authenticity	directness	honesty	partnership
trust	productivity	service	contribution
excellence	free spirit	focus	romance
recognition	harmony	accomplishment	organized
success	accuracy	lack of pretence	zest
tradition	recognition	performance	collaboration
community	personal power	connectedness	acknowledgment
comradeship	empowerment	joy	nurturing
full self-expression	beauty	risk taking	peace
elegance	vitality	integrity	contentment
adventure	responsibility	choice	creativity
learning	nature	spirituality	friendship
intimacy	innovate	fun	exercise
independence	sharing	growing	evolving
healthy	humour	balance	respect
honour	love	caring	nurturing
commitment	courage	fulfilment	enthusiasm
change	truth	power	

² Ted Roberts developed this list for his exercise on developing a "Purpose Statement."