

Your Mission Is Your Most Valuable Asset—Part Two

by Peter C. Brinckerhoff

In part one of this article, I told you that your mission is your most valuable asset, and that all of the decisions in your organization should result in one or more of the four following outcomes:

- More mission
- Better mission
- More effective mission
- More efficient mission

I then exhorted you to get the best mission possible by making sure your mission is accurate, concise, and inspiring. In this part, we'll examine how you can best use that spiffed-up mission to get the most out of your most valuable asset.

Once you have your mission statement in the form you want, your next task is to put the mission to the best use possible. Remember, the idea here is to get the most from this asset, and that usually doesn't mean shouting it from the rooftops. Rather, it's better to have a more focused use that gets to the key outcomes we discussed in part one:

- A strategic and tactical touchstone
- A staff and volunteer recruiter
- A staff and volunteer motivator
- A fundraising competitive advantage
- A reason for the people who you serve to show up

Before I get into each of these, let me digress about telling *mission stories*. All nonprofits have powerful stories, most centered around the growth that people have made when services touch them. Whether a human services, arts, spiritual, community development or other type of nonprofit, your organization almost always helps. And here's the key: That helping should turn into stories. People stories are the most effective way to communicate what your mission does.

Tell mission stories at every meeting

And we're built to hear people stories. Look at the all-business *Wall Street Journal* sometime. Every day, on the front page, in the center column above the fold is a story about a person in the business or government world. A people story.

You have these stories by the dozen. I call them *Johnny and Jenny stories*: "Johnny was (really in trouble, unable to read, malnourished, homeless) when he walked in our door, and now he's doing great!", "Jenny and her family were (dysfunctional, out of a home, not making their rent payment) and now, look at them!" These are the stories that you want to find and tell to let people know about your mission.

Find your mission stories and talk about them all the time. At each board and staff meeting give a 45 second (really, just that long) Jenny or Johnny story to remind people about the mission. Remember this is particularly important for those

At a glance

Your mission is your most valuable asset. Decisions, discussions, and strategies should start and end with a consideration of their impact on and expression of your mission. In this second of two-parts, Peter Brinckerhoff explains how to use your mission statement as:

- A strategic and tactical touchstone
- A staff and volunteer recruiter
- A staff and volunteer motivator
- A fundraising competitive advantage
- A reason for the people who you serve to show up

He also explains how to use *mission stories* to support your case.

on your staff who do not touch mission personally every day. NOTE: One great byproduct of telling these stories is that it gives the board and staff a ready set of verbal shorthand to answer the common question from friends and family: *What does your organization do?* The answer: “Well, we put people to work, but let me tell you a quick story about Jenny and her family...” They’ll listen closely—because you’re talking about people.

Put mission stories on your website and remember, video is cheap and the best way to tell these stories online. YouTube has brought the cost of making video way, way down. Like all things tech, you can use your younger staff and volunteers to get this done. Heck, you can go to your local high school National Honor Society advisor and ask him or her to give you a couple of students to help you. They almost always have video experience since they’ve done school projects in that format.

Find and tell your people stories. They are motivational gold.

Use your mission!

For **strategy and tactics**, do you use the mission in your decision making? Specifically? Does someone at the end of each staff and board meeting ask how the decisions made at that meeting improve the organization’s mission-capability? Did more than one or two people note, “This option has a better mission-outcome...?” You can’t talk about mission too much.

For **recruitment of staff and volunteers**, do you have your mission statement on your recruitment pages on your website? Better yet, do you also have mission stories in video on your website?

For **motivation of staff and volunteers**, tell the mission stories at every meeting, but make sure you offer the opportunity for different staff and volunteers to tell their own mission-based examples. Don’t just have the meeting leader always tell the stories. Do, however, urge meeting leaders to be on the lookout for fresh mission outcome stories all the time. Again, for board and staff who don’t touch mission every day, this is a huge work benefit.

In fundraising, short is better, getting to the point is key and you’ll lose them quickly if you don’t grab their attention. Make sure you use your mission and mission stories as effectively as you can (often in video) to ensure people know what their money is buying. Talk about mission *outcomes*, not just mission. Turn the mission statement around to give donors a chance to participate. For example,

“At Ronald McDonald House our mission is to provide a home away from home for families with critically ill children. Last year, XX number families were provided YY number days of free room and board so that they could better care for their hospitalized child. Your donation will help a family in great need.”

You can’t talk about mission too much. Why? Because it’s the reason people show up. Remember that the vast majority of your staff took a pay cut to come to the nonprofit sector *because of the mission*. Give them more of what they came for.

Most. Valuable. Asset.



Peter Brinckerhoff is an internationally acclaimed author, lecturer and consultant on nonprofit management and governance. Parts of this article are taken from Peter’s most recent book: *Smart Stewardship for Nonprofits: Making the Right Decision in Good Times and Bad*, published by John Wiley & Sons. You can learn more about Peter at his website: www.missionbased.com.

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