

## Building the Foundation for Success: Developing Powerful and Purposeful Mission, Vision and Values

Too often hospital leaders develop mission, vision and values statements, and then don't make meaningful strategic use of these critical statements. Successful governing boards know that these statements, when properly developed and used, are the primary driver for every governance discussion and decision.

**T**he board must ensure that the hospital or health system has meaningful, unique, market-specific and compelling mission, vision and values statements. These statements should inspire and lead employees, physicians, trustees, volunteers and others to the highest levels of achievement.

The entire hospital family, from top to bottom, should understand their role and value in achieving the hospital's mission and vision. Every single person plays a vital role, and each person should hold him or herself accountable for understanding that role and playing their part in the attainment of the mission and vision. That culture of commitment is created and inspired by the board.

The board also plays a unique role in motivating and inspiring hospital leadership to excel as strategic change leaders, individuals who can coalesce their colleagues in a strategic movement unified by purpose, committed to excellence, and rewarded for outstanding performance.

### Mission, Vision and Values - The Gears that Drive Organizational Success

The board of trustees is ultimately responsible in every way for the hospital's long-term success in meeting the health care needs of the people it serves. It's incumbent upon the board to ensure a tight strategic fit and linkage between the hospital's mission, vision and values.

These three statements are the foundation of a solid strategic plan. The board of trustees, more than any other group of leaders, is responsible as the "keepers" of these critical success factors.

The board must ensure that these statements are unique, meaningful, powerful and compelling, and that they help solidify organizational thinking when confronted with a multitude of potential pathways to the future.

Once solid mission, vision and values statements have been agreed upon by the board, these statements should be the forefront

of board decision making, and at the top of trustees' minds as they develop strategic plans, plan for programs and services, determine community needs, and advocate for legislative and regulatory change that will benefit the community.

## The Mission

***The mission is the core purpose of the hospital.*** It should be a unique description that clearly defines the hospital's distinctiveness and differentiation.

### ***What Makes a Mission Statement Great?***

Great mission statements are short, memorable, highly focused and enduring. They are able to capture in a few words the uniqueness of the organization and what it strives to accomplish. In addition, they clearly, boldly and vividly define the hospital's distinctive uniqueness - what sets it apart from other hospitals, and makes it a valuable asset to patients and the community.

Great mission statements use words and phrases that are compelling and passionate, and that inspire dedication and commitment. They are the foundation of everything the hospital does, and they inspire the hospital's vision and the strategies and objectives that underpin it.

Great mission statements are used at board meetings to help frame critical discussions and stimulate deliberative dialogue and decision-making. They are a focal point for ensuring that every employee, physician, board member, volunteer or other member of the hospital family understands his or her unique role in helping the hospital to carry out its most important work.

***Keeping the Mission Alive.*** Simply having a great mission statement doesn't guarantee that it will be consistently carried out with passion and purpose. In order to keep the mission alive, boards should consider:

## How Does Your Mission Measure Up?

- Is your mission dynamic, memorable, compelling, passionate and meaningful to everyone in the hospital family?
- Does it resonate with patients, consumers, payers, and community leaders?
- Does your mission clearly differentiate the hospital from all others in the market? Does it describe your competitive difference and distinctiveness?
- Does everyone in your organization know what the mission is? Can they relate the essence of it to patients, consumers and others? But more importantly, do they "live the vision" through the way they act and serve?

*Based on your answers, should your mission be changed to better reflect your hospital's true core purpose and value?*

- Printing the mission at the top of every board meeting agenda. Having the mission front and center on the agenda will help to ensure that it's thought about and referred to during the course of governance dialogue and decision-making.
- Taking time during its board meetings for "mission moments," opportunities to reflect on some of the ways in which the organization is carrying out its most important work. These mission moments can serve as an inspiring reminder of the importance of the hospital to patients, families and the community, and the importance of the governing board's work in ensuring constancy of purpose in achieving the mission.

- When making difficult decisions, asking: "how will this action, activity or decision further our ability to achieve our mission?"
- At the end of every meeting, taking a moment to reflect on this question: "has the work we've done today on behalf of the hospital and the people we serve advanced our ability to achieve our mission?"

## The Vision

***The vision is a vivid description of what the hospital or health system seeks to become in the future.*** It considers future challenges, possibilities and choices, and serves as a "high bar" for organizational success. Like the mission, creating a vision with passion and purpose takes time, innovative thinking, and an ability to think into the future.

***What Makes a Vision Statement Great?*** A strong vision statement should be:

- Inspiring, unique and visual, articulating what the hospital's hard work and investment is seeking to achieve, and preparing leadership thinking and resources to meet future challenges.
- Written in a way that creates a mental image of the hospital at a future point in time.
- Enduring, and able to stand the test of time.
- Hopeful, empowering and measurable, providing purpose and focus in a dynamic, rapidly-changing environment.
- Encompass the "big goals" that drive strategies, objectives and action plans.
- Provide leadership with an "end point" that serves as the foundation for the hospital's strategies and objectives.
- While it should be a "stretch," and be very challenging to achieve, it should also be

## How Does Your Vision Measure Up?

- Have you defined the areas in which your future success is most critical?
- Is your vision a powerful statement of the hospital or health system's future in the areas most important to its success?
- Does your vision connect with the mission and values?
- Is your vision realistic, while at the same time an organizational "performance stretch?"
- Is your vision relatable to every area and every person in the organization?
- Does your organization measure progress in achieving the vision?

realistic and attainable with hard, focused work by everyone in the organization.

***The Dynamics of Creating a Vision.*** The key components of a vibrant vision are straightforward. They consist of the now - where the hospital is today; the future - an assessment of where the environment is headed; the focus - the responses the hospital intends to undertake to be successful in that future; and the future reality - where the hospital anticipates it will be when it's successful in achieving its prioritized strategic initiatives.

***The Vision Shouldn't Be Generic.*** Many believe that a vision should be a simple, short and concise statement. That view often leads to a very general goal that doesn't truly describe the future the hospital seeks to achieve.

Instead, a successful, high-value, strategically usable vision is one that describes what the organization seeks to become in the future in several critical organizational success areas. For example, what is the hospital's vision for improvement in the community's health? What does the board want to be able to say about the

level of quality and patient safety in five years? How will the hospital adopt and implement new information technology, telehealth, and new medical technology in five years? What is the hospital's vision in the area of finance, patient and customer loyalty and satisfaction, and overall corporate culture?

In order to successfully achieve the mission, what other organizations will the hospital seek partnerships with, and what will those partnerships look like? What new services will the hospital develop and excel in as a center of excellence? What changes in governance and leadership will be in place in five or ten years, and how will those changes benefit the organization?

These are the types of questions that should be asked by the board in the process of developing a value-focused strategic vision. They establish an agenda for strategic change that must be supported by clearly-defined strategies and measurable objectives.

## Values

**Values are the principles and beliefs that drive organizational behavior at every level throughout the entire organization.** The values are inspirational guideposts, the ethical compass that inspires people to live their professional lives in a certain way, and relate to patients, families, visitors, competitors, and others by exhibiting certain organizational and personal qualities and characteristics.

Values are not simply a collection of high-sounding words on a wall in the hospital lobby. They are the “rules of the road” that signify what the hospital is and what it believes. They should be communicated and demonstrated through action – every day, in every way.

**Good Values Create Better Organizations.** Good values can create better organizations if

they are more than just platitudes. Truly meaningful values:

- Are the unchangeable, bedrock core principles and ethics that guide the actions and belief structure of the organization.
- Are the fundamental beliefs and truisms that guide organizational behavior and decision making.
- Serve as “cultural cornerstones,” a blueprint for organizational, employee, and medical staff behavior.
- Set the organization apart from its competitors, and establish its unique organizational culture.
- Limit operational freedom and constrain behavior in order to ensure compliance with all laws and regulations, and set a high ethical bar.
- Demand constant vigilance to keep them at the forefront of organizational behavior and expectations.

### How Do Your Values Measure Up?

- How distinctive are your values?
- Do your values make a positive difference in the way people act, serve and relate to one another?
- Do your values support the mission, vision and strategies?
- Does your organization use the values when evaluating employee performance?
- Does your hospital or health system showcase examples of living the values?
- Does your hospital enforce its values, even when it's uncomfortable?

### ***Putting the Hospital's Values to Work.***

Having values is important, but embedding them into the hospital's culture is critical. The board can help make that happen.

The hospital's values should be integrated into every employee-related process – hiring, performance evaluation, criteria for promotion and awards, and dismissal. They should continually remind everyone in the hospital family that the values form the basis for every decision the organization makes, particularly the most difficult ones.

One way to highlight and instill the values is to tell stories about how employees, physicians, volunteers, trustees and others exemplify the hospital's values in their work. Successful demonstration of the organization's values should also be celebrated at employee meetings, board meetings, community meetings and other venues.

## **Making Your Mission, Vision and Values More Than Words on Paper**

***Keep the Mission Center.*** The mission, vision and values should be prominent elements of decision making at all board meetings. Not only should they be displayed with every board meeting agenda, but items should not appear on the board agenda unless they are directly connected to the mission, vision and values. When considering any decision, boards should always discuss how the decision will contribute to fulfilling the organization's mission.

***Check Alignment with the Strategic Course.*** When considering policy and strategy decisions, boards should put them to the mission, values and vision alignment test. Do they fit? Can their rationale be explained? Is an investment in them an investment in furthering mission, values and vision success?

In addition, boards should regularly examine their strategic progress by reviewing the

indicators that tell them whether they're on the right strategic course, and continually probe the value of their initiatives in helping them achieve their mission and vision. They should also ensure that a well-defined board-approved system is in place to measure progress toward achieving the mission, vision and strategies, and take timely corrective action when necessary.

***What Do We Know Today that We Didn't Know Then?*** One vital question that should be regularly asked by the board of trustees is this:

*“What do we know today that we didn't know when we developed our vision for the future? And if we had known then what we know now, would our assumptions change? Would our strategies change? What would we be doing differently?”*

It's important that the mission, vision and values be reviewed on a planned, predictable basis, such as at the board's annual retreat. These should not be static statements. Instead, they evolve as the environment evolves.

Assumptions should be challenged, and developing realities should be factored into the hospital's thinking about what it is and where it's headed. The only way to ensure that occurs is through a continual flow of new information, new ideas, and new knowledge that drives new assumptions.

***Seek Leadership Involvement, Particularly From the Medical Staff.*** Defining the hospital's mission, vision and values is not the exclusive job of the board. It's one of the primary responsibilities of the board, but to do it right requires involvement and buy-in across the organization.

The medical staff is one of the principal groups whose input and involvement is critical to success. In addition, the board should always depend on well thought-out options and alternatives from management to help shape the mission, vision and values course.

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