

EXERCISE

“NOUNS AND VERBS” MISSION STATEMENT EXERCISE

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When working with a group, this is one of the easiest ways I know to create a mission statement. The “Nouns and Verbs” exercise will work for either an organization or a project. Simultaneously, you can determine “what business the group is in”, and can craft the words to describe that business.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Ask participants to take a minute to silently consider “what the purpose of the organization or project is. As they think about this question, consider what words and phrases come to mind. Ask participants to individually post these words and phrases on data cards, and place either an "N" or a "V" in the top right corner to indicate whether the word is used as a noun or a verb. If offering is a phrase, don't worry about what part of speech it is, just make sure the idea is captured on data cards. As in all storyboarding exercises, each idea or thought gets its own card.

Place all the data cards on the storyboard in the proper categories. Many words can be either verb or nouns, so the facilitator can use the excuse of clarifying the part of speech as an opportunity to get the group discussing what these terms mean to them, and what they mean to the organization.

Once all words and phrases are on the boards, select two people to work as a team and arrange the cards in an order that might represent an accurate mission statement for the organization. To put more life in the exercise, set a fixed time for completion... say, two or three minutes. The balance of the group watches the process, looks for missing words, and prepares to analyze the work once the first team is done. Ask one of the observers to post (real time and upon request) adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions and other connectors that the team may need. For this first round, do not add any nouns or verbs that were not originally offered.

Once this team has completed its first "cut" ask the observers to identify any additional nouns and verbs that seemed important to the mission but were missing. Ask, “Why didn't you consider these words earlier?” Use this opportunity to discuss the business that is being described in the mission. “Does this mission adequately describe your business?”

Select another two-person team to try their hand at mission statement. Same rules and process applies for this group, except that they may add verbs and nouns as they think of them, and you may want to extend the time they have to complete the exercise.

Ask the group, “How does this mission statement differ from the first one?”

At this point, ask the entire group if they feel they can come up with the final draft and gain consensus on their mission in the next five minutes. Normally the group will indicate they can't do it in five minutes, however, if they believe they can complete the task, allow them the opportunity.

If the group believes that the final draft of a mission statement will take longer, ask the group to select a three person team to take all the data generated during the exercise, go to a “break out room” and develop the final draft. Their job is to bring a mission statement back to the group later during the day for review, amendment and adoption.