

# BoardBrief

Knowledge Resources for Health Care Governing Effectiveness

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

Too often hospital leaders develop mission, values and vision 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 has meaningful, unique, market-specific and compelling mission, values and vision statements that inspire and lead employees, physicians, trustees, volunteers and others to the highest levels of achievement.

The board must ensure that the entire hospital family, from top to bottom, sees its 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.

Finally, the board 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, Values and Vision - 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, recruit physicians, 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.

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 with purpose. In order to keep the mission alive it should be printed 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.

The board should take time during its board meetings for "mission moments," opportunities to reflect on some of the ways in which the hospital 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

The board of trustees faces many situations in which it has very difficult decisions to make. When making these difficult decisions, one important question should always be asked: "how will this action, activity or decision further our ability to achieve our mission?"

Finally, at the end of every meeting take 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?"

### How Does Your Mission Measure Up?

Consider the following questions to determine how your hospital's mission measures up to "great mission" criteria:

- 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?

## The Vision

The vision is a vivid description of what the hospital 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.

The vision should be inspiring, unique and visual; it should be written in a way that creates a mental image of the hospital at a future point in time. It should be enduring, and able to stand the test of time. It should be hopeful, empowering and measurable, providing purpose and focus in a dynamic, rapidly-changing environment. And while it should be a "stretch," and be very challenging to achieve, it should also be realistic and attainable with hard, focused work by everyone in the organization.

The vision should inspire enthusiasm and commitment in every corner of the organization, articulating what the hospital's hard work and investment is seeking to achieve, and prepare leadership thinking and resources to meet future challenges. It should be powerful and empowering. Finally, the vision should encompass the "big goals" that drive strategies, objectives and action plans.

***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.

***Elements of a Value-Based Vision.*** 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 hospital 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, such as electronic health records, online appointments and e-prescribing 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 10 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.

**An Ideal Vision.** An ideal vision is challenging, but at the same time realistic and attainable with diligence, commitment, and intelligent leadership. It's powerful, hopeful and empowering, and it inspires enthusiasm for the future and a commitment to achieving the hospital's mission.

An ideal vision provides purpose and focus during challenging and uncertain times. It takes into account the hospital's current and emerging challenges and opportunities, provides purpose and focus, and describes a future that has successfully dealt with them. In addition, it drives creative strategic thinking, and provides leadership with an "end point" that serves as the foundation for the hospital's strategies and objectives.

### How Does Your Vision Measure Up?

Think about the hospital's vision. How does it measure up?

- Have you defined the areas in which your future success is most critical?
- Is your vision a powerful statement of the hospital'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 hospital measure progress in achieving the vision?

### 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," the aspects of personal and professional behavior 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. They serve as "cultural cornerstones," a blueprint for organizational, employee, and medical staff behavior. They are the fundamental beliefs and truisms that guide organizational behavior and decision making. They set the organization apart from its competitors, and establish its unique organizational culture.

In addition, values limit operational freedom and constrain behavior in order to ensure compliance with all laws and regulations, and set a high ethical bar. Finally, they demand constant vigilance to keep them at the forefront of organizational behavior and expectations.

**Putting the Hospital's Values to Work.** Having values is important, but embedding them into the hospital's culture is critical, and 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.

They should be promoted at every opportunity, and become infused in the organization's behavior. 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. Finally, demonstrating the values should be celebrated at employee meetings, board meetings, community meetings and other venues.

### How Do Your Values Measure Up?

Do a quick values check. How do your hospital's 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 hospital use the values when evaluating employee performance?
- Does your hospital showcase examples of living the values?
- Does your hospital enforce its values, even when it's uncomfortable?

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

To ensure success in living their values and achieving their mission and vision, governing boards can take several simple steps.

First, ensure that the mission, values and vision are prominent elements of decision making at all board meetings. They should be prominently displayed with every board meeting agenda. And when considering any decision, boards should discuss how the decision will contribute to fulfilling the mission, values and vision.

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, values and vision 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 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, values and vision 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. Talk of mission, values and vision is often met with disinterest or rejection by physicians, who may not see value in the process. Involvement in mission, values and vision thinking and planning by medical staff leaders is a critical factor in success. In addition, the board should always depend on well thought-out options and alternatives from management to help shape the mission, values and vision course.



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Larry has been a long-time governance leader, both as a consultant and a trustee. He served for six years as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of 107-bed Mt. Hood Medical Center, Gresham, Oregon. He has also been a trustee of Portland, Oregon's Legacy Health System and two of its predecessor organizations, Healthlink and Metropolitan Hospitals, with a combined 12 years of governing service to these three systems.

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