

BoardBrief

Knowledge Resources for Health Care Governing Effectiveness

Driving Change: Integrating Mission, Values and Vision into Board Leadership

Too often organizations develop mission, values and vision statements, and then don't think about the statements again until the next strategic planning session. Successful boards know that the opposite is true: these statements should be the primary driver for every hospital board discussion and decision.

The hospital's mission, vision, and values are the foundation of a solid strategic plan. And the board of trustees, more than any other group of leaders, is responsible as the "keepers" of these critical success factors.

Before developing detailed strategies and objectives, the board needs to review and revise these statements to ensure they are powerful and compelling, and that they solidify the organization for future success. Once solid mission, vision and values statements have been agreed upon by the board, these statements should be placed at the forefront of board decision making, and be at the top of trustees' minds as they develop their strategic plan.

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

The values are the principles and beliefs that drive organizational behavior at every level throughout the hospital.

The vision is a vivid description of what the hospital seeks to become in the future, on whatever time horizon the board and senior management choose. It takes into account future challenges, future possibilities and future choices. And, when it's properly crafted it can serve as a set of far-reaching goals that drive strategies and objectives.

The Mission Statement

Mission statements are crucial because they define the reason an organization exists. Great mission statements are short, memorable, and enduring. To ensure the mission remains squarely at the forefront of board and leadership dialogue and

decision making, consider printing it on the first page of all board documents, including board agendas, bylaws, the conflict of interest statement, and, of course, the strategic plan.

Keeping the mission visible will help to make it memorable. In addition, it will ensure that one important question is asked often by board members: "how will this action or activity further our ability to achieve our mission?"

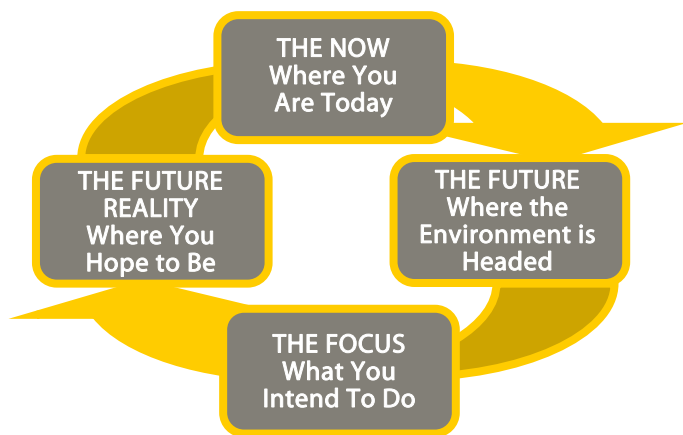
The Vision Statement

While the mission explains the hospital's core purpose - what the organization is and what it does - the vision describes the future the hospital is striving for. 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.



Dynamics of 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 - what responses the hospital intends to undertake to be successful in that future; and the future reality - where the hospital anticipates it will be when its successful in achieving its prioritized strategic initiatives.



A good vision statement should also be challenging and focused. It should be “enduring,” and able to stand the test of time. And it should be hopeful, empowering and measurable. It should provide 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.

It should inspire enthusiasm and commitment throughout the organization, and should have a bit of the “gulp factor,” which causes those responsible for achieving it to gulp a bit as they consider the challenges inherent in achieving the vision.

Elements of a Value-Based Vision. Many people believe that a vision should be short, concise and general in nature. This is the wrong way to both develop and attempt to put a vision to work in the strategic planning process. Instead, a successful, high-value, strategically usable vision should be one that vividly 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? 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. And they’re the kinds of questions that establish an agenda for strategic change that must be supported by defining strategies and measurable objectives.

The Values Statement

The third leg of the strategic planning foundation, the values statement, is comprised of the core principles and ethics that guide the actions and beliefs of the organization at every level.

The values are the inspirational guideposts or “ethical compass” that inspire 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.

Ensuring a Continual Focus on the Mission, Values and Vision

To keep the mission, values and vision in the forefront, the board of trustees should consider incorporating the following into its governance processes:

- Examine the mission, vision and values in relation to today’s challenges and opportunities; ensure that each is appropriate and forceful in driving strategies, objectives, action plans, opportunities and obligations over the next several years;
- Ensure that mission, values and vision are prominent elements of decision making at all board meetings; review annually at the board retreat, challenging the assumptions in place at the time the mission and vision were conceived, and modify based on the realities of today’s environment;
- Test all policy and strategy decisions by asking how/if they will strengthen the ability to achieve the mission and vision;
- Regularly review the status of strategies and objectives, and ensure fit with mission and vision;

- Ensure that a well-defined board-approved system is in place to measure progress toward achieving mission, vision and strategies, and take timely corrective action, when necessary;
- Ensure that medical staff leadership is actively involved in all phases of strategic planning leadership;
- Demand well thought-out strategic options and alternatives from management prior to defining a strategic course of action;
- Ensure that a continual flow of new information and assumptions are presented at board meetings, and that trustees use the information to quickly modify strategic direction as necessary;
- Produce strategically-oriented committee and task force reports that enable a continual focus on strategic issues;
- Continue to conduct an annual board self-assessment to identify specific “leadership gaps” and governance improvement opportunities;
- Continually scan the environment for meaningful change critical to hospital success; present findings to keep the board focused on issues and priorities vital to organizational success;
- Develop and implement a process for creating an annual governance improvement plan; and
- Annually assess environmental and organizational changes on the horizon, and determine new governance skills required to forcefully and effectively lead throughout the change process; develop skills through education and board renewal.

Sample Values

Here are some examples of hospital values:

- **Integrity:** Maintaining the highest standards of behavior. Encompasses honesty, ethics, and doing the right things for the right reasons.
- **Vision:** The ability and willingness to look forward to the future and make decisions necessary to accomplish important goals.
- **Innovation:** Capable of extraordinary creativity and willing to explore new approaches to improving quality of life for all persons.
- **Superior Service:** Committed to providing excellent service and compassionate care.
- **Stewardship:** Dedicated to responsible stewardship of our assets and financial resources, and to community service.
- **Teamwork:** An abiding respect for others, and a sustaining commitment to work together.



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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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- AssessmentWORKS™, a comprehensive board self-assessment
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