

THE AMAZING POWER OF PURPOSE

By Stephen R. Graves

It does not matter what is wrong. Whether you have a fever, a broken arm, or a missing limb, a visit to the doctor always seems to start the same way. After waiting, you are guided to an empty room and asked to sit on an examining table with what seems like the world's loudest tissue paper. Then your exam begins. No matter what your symptoms are, the nurse always checks the same basic things – temperature, blood pressure, and pulse. Those few little measurements, your “vitals,” provide the doctor with an instant snapshot of your overall health.

The Four P's: In the business and professional world, the traditional “Four P's” are similar to the vitals the doctor takes every time you go in for a check-up. They are Product, People, Process, and Profit. Just as temperature, blood pressure, and pulse give a physician a picture of your overall health, the Four P's tell any good consultant or coach the overall health of your business. Whether it is marketing challenges, a sales dip or impending bankruptcy, we know if something is off, we need to explore more deeply.

In the area of organizational health, the Four P's have served as constant points of discussion and discernment throughout my entire coaching career. Without fail, every time I work with a leader or an organization that is looking to grow, we spend time examining the strength and sustainability of each P.

The Fifth P: The Power of the Purpose: Over the years, however, I have made an important shift in my approach to these conversations. I still work through the traditional four, but those now make up the second part of our work. The way we address areas like product and process is guided and, in some sense determined, by a fifth P: Purpose. Purpose gets to the “why” of an organization. It pushes past the “what” and “how” and gets at something deeper – if in fact there is something deeper.

Purpose should be our starting point and anchor. Another way to think about purpose is to ask, “Why does your organization exist? What is your reason for being?” Can you answer these questions? Have you considered them? Whatever your answer may be, it should be about more than product or service or profit. It should capture the essence of what motivates and drives you to work – and to work well.

Purpose, when rightly conceived, is a powerful force for shaping an organization. It informs how you develop products, build processes, and develop people. It even guides how you think about and use your profits. Unlike the other P's, purpose has the potential for permanence. Market conditions may force a change to your offering. Technology may alter your processes. Demographic shifts may dictate your approach to labor. Purpose not only outlast these forces, but also shapes your response to them.

If you are a person of faith, a follower of Jesus Christ, you could frame it as a “redemptive edge,” starting with serving the Lord and then serving others. Colossians 3:23-24 says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you

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地址: 香港上環禧利街2號東寧大廈20樓2004室 Tel: (852) 2805-1923

Email: enquiry@cbmc.org.hk Web: www.cbmc.org.hk

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will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a result.” Our purpose should begin with utilizing our gifts and abilities for God’s glory.

If we are to be effective as “Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us” (2 Corinthians 5:20), we should strive to distinguish ourselves from competitors who are not committed to following Him. Our decisions and actions should be done within the context of Jesus’ command to “let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see our good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). What greater purpose could we have?

© 2023. Dr. Stephen R. Graves describes himself as an organizational strategist, pragmatic theologian, and social capitalist. He advises executives and business owners, as well as young entrepreneurs. He is author of numerous books and many articles, and a public speaker.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever thought about how a physician always checks your “vitals” – your blood pressure, temperature, and pulse – whenever you go for a checkup or have an illness? What would you think if the doctor failed to check those important physical measurements.
2. What about what Mr. Graves describes as “the four P’s” – Product, People, Process, and Profit? Are those areas of measurement that you and your business often consider for evaluating how well the organization is performing? What happens if you discover weaknesses in one or more of those areas for assessing a company’s overall health?
3. How often do you think organizations include the fifth “P” – Purpose – in their periodic performance evaluations? How would you define or describe your company’s purpose? Do you think that is clear for everyone involved in the organization? Explain your answer.
4. For followers of Jesus Christ, especially those in positions of influence, it is suggested that an important part of their overall purpose should be to honor and bring glory to God, and to serve others in ways that serve as a positive witness to the Lord and the Gospel message? Do you agree with this? Why or why not?

CHALLENGE

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, how much does your faith in Him affect your approach to work? If you believe this is an area that needs some work, whether professionally or personally, who could you ask to assist you in developing a statement of purpose that can guide your decisions and actions in ways that honor Him? Consider setting a specific time and place where you can discuss this.

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages: Psalm 37:3-6; Proverbs 3:5-6; Matthew 6:19-21,33; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17

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地址: 香港上環禧利街2號東寧大廈20樓2004室 Tel: (852) 2805-1923

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