

The Family Mission Statement

“It doesn’t get much better than this and it’s Friday to boot!” Dave heard the voice behind him say. He didn’t have to turn around to know that it was one of his long-time running partners, Winville. After all, they had been running together at lunchtime — meeting on the same street corner, at the same time and following the same route for more than 10 years. Winville owned a successful real estate development firm that had originally been started by his father.

“You are right,” Dave responded as Winville appeared in front of him, “this weather is awesome, and it is forecast to stay this way through the weekend. I confess that late summer heat wave of the past few days took more out of me than I expected.”

“Better get used to it.” Winville offered, “Global warming, you know!”

“Unfortunately, I fear you are right,” Dave reacted.

“Say, do you know if Jim or Alan or Julie are joining us today?”

Jim was another veteran member of the running group. He founded a cloud-based software company several years ago that was now booming after he converted his business to a subscription-based model. In addition to being part of the group, Jim was a client of Dave’s financial and investment advisory practice.

“I’m here,” Alan said as he jogged up to the street corner to join Dave and Winville. Alan was a lawyer “with a personality”, as Jim liked to describe him — he was a great storyteller and always seemed to have some example from his legal practice that fit into whatever conversation the group was having. Alan was also one of Dave’s clients.

Julie, the sole female in the group, was a sporadic participant in the Noon hour run. She owned a thriving renewable energy product manufacturing business that took her all over the world. She joined whenever she could and always amazed everyone one with her speed and stamina, despite only running with the group occasionally.

“I haven’t heard from Jim or Julie,” Winville said, “but everyone knows the rule — not here by 12:25, we leave without you — and that would be about now.”

Dave joined Winville and Alan as they started off on their hour-long run, but not without looking back over his shoulder to make sure Jim wasn't just a few minutes late. Sure enough, he came running around the corner and easily caught up to the group before they got too far ahead.

As it was not like Jim to be late for a run, Dave asked, "Hey, Jim – how is it going?"

"OK, I guess," Jim responded. "I just got caught up in a meeting that ran later than it was supposed to."

Jim's demeanor and apparent low energy level were uncharacteristic, prompting Dave to further question, "What's on your mind Jim?"

"I'm still thinking about some of the things that were discussed at the meeting I just finished", Jim replied.

Dave hesitated for a minute before saying, "As you might imagine, in my business, I get to hear a lot of stories — some are magic, and some are tragic. But one thing I have learned is that it is usually better for people to talk about something that is bothering them than not. As your long-time friend and advisor, I feel a responsibility to ask if there is anything that I might help you with? Is it your business, your family...?"

"Funny that you ask it that way," Jim interjected. "It is actually both. The business is doing very well, but frankly, our success seems to be causing an increasing amount of friction within the family. Does that make sense?"

"Actually, it does," Dave said. "And I have seen this before with other clients, where a rapidly-growing business changes the family dynamic as the business competes with the family for time and attention. In your case, as we have talked about in the past, you have family members working in your business, so the potential for conflict is multiplied several times over."

"You are correct — my wife and our two adult children all work in the business and it gets even more complicated because my in-laws are shareholders. They invested in the company when it

was just a start-up and now that we are doing so well, I am getting the sense they want a bigger say in what goes on inside the business.

“I have always thought we had great relationships in our family and that I could deal with any disagreements that arose just by listening to both sides and negotiating a solution, but now my confidence in my ability as an arbitrator is waning.”

“It’s not like anyone is trying to sabotage anyone else,” Jim continued. “In fact, I know we all still care about each other and the family as a whole. But when tensions rise, we seem to have forgotten some of the family values we used to hold so dear that have enabled our success.”

By now, Dave and Jim had slowed their pace a little. As a consequence, they had fallen well behind Wenville and Alan, who kept looking back to make sure everything was okay. Both Jim and Dave waved to let them know they should carry on at their normal pace.

“Jim, I have come to know you as a highly-principled person,” Dave offered after a moment of reflection, “so I am not at all surprised your business is founded on some strong personal values. You say your family shares those values, but have you ever had a family conversation about them?”

“You mean where we all sit around in a circle holding hands and talk about them?” Jim joked.

“Something like that — but don’t forget the candles in a dimly lit room!” Dave countered with a bit of sarcasm of his own.

“Well, we certainly haven’t had any ‘group sessions’, so to speak, to discuss our values”, Jim smirked as he spoke. “I feel they should be evident in the things we say and do every day. I have always tried to lead by example.”

“Of course, you have,” Dave agreed. “Let me ask another question. Do you have a Family Mission Statement?”

“Yeah, a few years ago, when we made the switch to a subscription-based revenue model, we hired a consultant to help develop our mission statement to better communicate the company’s revamped value proposition. We put a fair bit of work into the exercise. It is posted

on our website and occasionally, I have referred others to it to describe what we represent as a firm. I don't know that it makes any difference to our current or future customers, but it helps keep us, as a company, on track with what we promise to deliver to our customers."

"That's great," Dave congratulated him, "but I asked if you had a 'family' mission statement, not a 'business' mission statement."

Jim thought for a moment, before saying, "I think I understand the distinction, but in our case, as a family-owned and operated business, aren't they the same thing?"

"It is true," Dave responded, "that your business and your family are inextricably entwined and what is good for one should be good for the other; however, there is one very important difference — and that is perspective."

"How so?" Jim asked.

"You already gave us half the answer when you said your current Mission Statement helps keep you focused on your company's value proposition. In other words, it is from the perspective of what your customers can expect when they do business with you. A Family Mission Statement, however, is from the perspective of your family. It's what they should expect from other family members, individually and as a group. It goes back to those personal values you talked about. If they were as important to building your business as you say, perhaps it is time to revisit them in a tangible way — by developing a Family Mission Statement."

By now, Dave and Jim had reached the western boundary of their normal running route, so they turned south towards the lake that fronted the downtown area of the city. At the first intersection south, however, they found their way blocked by the ubiquitous road construction that seemed to be taking over the city. They quickly turned back east one block, then south to the next street, and ran west again until they were able to turn south to rejoin their original path.

The interruption to their normal routine had stopped the conversation Dave and Jim were having as they navigated their way around the road closure. Back on track again, it was Jim who picked up where the dialogue had left off.

“I like the idea of having a Family Mission Statement; but when I think about the work we put into the company’s Mission Statement, I am not sure I can get everyone to commit to sitting around the Boardroom table while our consultant walks us through what I assume would be a similar process.”

“What if you moved the conversation from the Boardroom to the dining room?”

“I’m not sure what you mean,” Jim reacted.

“In my experience, writing a Family Mission Statement is best done in a family setting, not a boardroom. The process doesn’t have to be as formal as the one you’d have for your business. There is no one right way to write a Family Mission Statement, except to say that it should be short – no more than a few sentences. And, it should capture the values by which the family wants to live and that all agree are important enough to put in writing.

“I’d be willing to bet that everyone already knows pretty much what those principles are. A family meeting can provide a safe environment where everyone’s voice is heard, and where, through collaboration, they take mutual ownership of the outcome.

“This type of discussion can also serve as a way for the family to articulate their vision of what they think the company should look like in the future. This is important for the next generation – your kids, who may someday take over the business when you are a little long in the tooth. You might be surprised at their view of the world. It will help with any long-term strategy you might be contemplating.

“Is that a conversation you could at least start, with all the family present around your dining room table some Sunday afternoon?”

Jim didn’t respond right away, but his pace quickened as if he was trying to make up for lost time. Because Dave had been doing most of the talking, he had to dig a bit deeper to keep up. They soon arrived at the road beside the lakeshore and turned east back towards their starting point. The run along the lakefront was everyone’s favorite part of their route. Somehow the noise on the left side from the city was quieted by the mostly calm waters of the lake on the right.

Dave couldn't tell if it was that sense of tranquility or their conversation, but Jim's mood had certainly lightened. "The family is all together this weekend to celebrate my son's 35th birthday. Perhaps I could start a conversation like this then," he said. "But I am not sure how. What do I say?"

"Before you worry about what to say, keep in mind that this is a process, not an event," Dave suggested. You don't have to get it done all at once. Take your time, be patient. As far as what to say, you already told me that your company was built on some strong family values — perhaps, they just need to be re-visited to remind everyone of who you are as a family. You want to be sure those values are still shared and can form part of a collective vision for the future so that everyone can make their own plans.

"Perhaps you can use our running group as an example or analogy. While we have never discussed it as such specifically, in fact, we have a "Running Mission Statement". While we all come with different views of the world and experiences, we share common values. We all believe that running is part of a bigger picture of health. We don't typically run our 10K and then head to the fast food court for some fries and gravy. Sure, occasionally, we succumb to an impulse and enjoy those fries, but our mission and a small dose of guilt fairly quickly bring us back on track.

"We have a vision of how we want to look and feel as we get older. And when something challenges us, like the blocked roadway did today, we don't give up on our objective — we find a workaround until we are able to get back onto our planned course. And when we have a bad day running, as we all do from time to time, we don't abandon our mission. We rely on the good habits we have built to get us back to form.

"Does that make sense?"

"I like the running analogy," Jim replied. "I can certainly speak with some passion about that. But how do I structure the discussion?"

"Again," Dave suggested, "keep it simple and informal. I would probably let people know in advance that you have some "family matters" you want to talk about after you have enjoyed

your son's birthday cake. Assure anyone who asks, that the discussion will be a positive one. Don't leave them wondering if you are about to announce something horrible.

"I would start off by saying how proud you are of the family and what you have accomplished together. Of course, the business will be a central point, but try to highlight some personal accomplishments too — graduations, grandkids, community involvement, and the like.

"Perhaps you could then segue your pride in the family to a recounting of the values that you feel have guided the family business. Ask everyone if they agree; then ask them to suggest any other values they think should be on the list.

You might start the conversation with questions like:

"What are the words that describe our family's core values?"

"What inspires us and brings us together as family?"

"What things are truly important to us as a family?"

"What kinds of relationships do we want to have with each other?"

"When we look back on our family in 20 years, what would we like to say was our purpose?"

"From these questions you can present our Running Mission Statement, if you want to use it as an example. Then say something like, 'In the same way that we have a Mission Statement that describes our business, I'd like us to have a Family Mission Statement that captures what our family is all about and describes our core values. I'd like it to be in writing so we can refer to it whenever we feel that we need to be reminded; when anyone feels they aren't being heard or respected or are being mistreated in any way by the family.'

"Add that it doesn't have to be long – just a few sentences that you all agree are important and meaningful to the family.

"Do you think you could begin with this type of conversation?" Dave finished.

Jim didn't answer right away and by now, they had reached the street where they had to turn north to get back to the health club where they started and where they would shower before returning to work.

"You obviously know a lot about this," Jim finally said. "Do you have any sample Family Mission Statements I could look at for some ideas on how to put one together?"

"Yes, I do," Dave responded. "I've gone through this conversation with more than a few other clients and I have gotten permission from several to share the statements they created – anonymously, of course. I will send them over to you as soon as I get back to the office and I'll also include the link to the Franklin Covey website¹ which has a useful tool to help you put your mission statement together. Once you get your Family Missions Statement nailed, I have some other governance-type things we should probably discuss that will help, for example, address your in-laws' desire for greater involvement in the business and similar matters."

"That would be very much appreciated," Jim thanked him.

They completed the rest of the run in silence, but Dave could tell that Jim was already visualizing and, perhaps, even rehearsing parts of the dining room table conversation he was going to have that weekend.

¹ <https://msb.franklincovey.com>

Appendix

Values Exercise Adapted from Taproot: (<http://www.taproot.com/archives/37771>)

1. Print a copy of this page for each family member.
2. Each family member reads through the list and chooses and circles every core value that they feel represents the family. Do not overthink selections, simply circle the words that feel like a core value to your family. If you think of a value that is not on the list, be sure to write it down as well.

Abundance	Decisiveness	Intuition	Relationships
Abundance Acceptance	Dedication	Joy	Reliability
Accountability	Dependability	Knowledge	Resilience
Achievement	Diversity	Leadership	Resourcefulness
Advancement	Empathy	Learning	Respect
Adventure	Encouragement	Love	Responsibility
Advocacy	Enthusiasm	Loyalty	Responsiveness
Ambition	Ethics	Making a Difference	Safety
Appreciation	Excellence	Mindfulness	Security
Attractiveness	Expressiveness	Motivation	Self-Control
Autonomy	Fairness	Nurturing	Selflessness
Balance	Family	Optimism	Service
Being the Best	Friendships	Open-Mindedness	Sharing
Benevolence	Flexibility	Originality	Simplicity
Boldness	Freedom	Passion	Spirituality
Brilliance	Fun	Patience	Stability
Calmness	Generosity	Peace	Success
Caring	Grace	Perfection	Teamwork
Challenge	Growth	Performance	Thankfulness
Charity	Flexibility	Personal Development	Thoughtfulness
Cheerfulness	Fulfillment	Proactive	Traditionalism
Cleverness	Happiness	Professionalism	Trustworthiness
Community	Health	Playfulness	Understanding
Commitment	Honesty	Positiveness	Uniqueness
Compassion	Humility	Popularity	Usefulness
Cooperation	Humor	Power	Versatility
Collaboration	Inclusiveness	Preparedness	Vision
Consistency	Independence	Proactivity	Warmth
Contribution	Individuality	Professionalism	Wealth
Creativity	Innovation	Punctuality	Well-Being
Credibility	Inspiration	Quality	Wisdom
Curiosity	Integrity	Recognition	Zeal
Daring	Intelligence	Risk Taking	

3. Gather every family members 1st page of circled values. Group all similar values together from the list of values. Group them in a way that makes sense to your family. See examples below.

Abundance	Caring	Appreciation	Balance	Cheerfulness
Community	Inclusiveness	Humility	Empathy	Fun
Freedom	Intuition	Encouragement	Honesty	Happiness
Independence	Love	Open-	Growth	Humor
Integrity	Trustworthiness	Mindedness	Patience	Inspiration
Flexibility	Respect	Respect	Spirituality	Kindness
Knowledge	Uniqueness	Mindfulness	Well-being	Optimism
Learning	Understanding			Positiveness

4. Choose key words within each grouping that best represents the most common among your family’s lists. Again, do not overthink your labels. There are no right or wrong answers. You are defining the answer that are right for your family. See the example below. Use the values that are most common to help craft your draft Family Mission Statement using **Franklin Covey Mission Statement Builder:** <https://msb.franklincovey.com>

Abundance	Caring	Appreciation	Balance	Cheerfulness
Community	Inclusiveness	Humility	Empathy	Fun
Freedom	Intuition	Encouragement	Honesty	Happiness
Independence	Love	Open-	Growth	Humor
Integrity	Trustworthiness	Mindedness	Patience	Inspiration
Flexibility	Respect	Respect	Spirituality	Kindness
Knowledge	Uniqueness	Mindfulness	Well-being	Optimism
Learning	Understanding			Positiveness

5. You can continue to write and revise your mission statement until you feel it reflects your family. You may also try going through the Freewrite section the site to help you refine your mission and values.

Sample Family Mission Statements

Anonymous Sample Mission Statements from <https://msb.franklincovey.com>:

My mission is to give, for giving is what I do best, and I can learn to do better.

I will seek to learn, for learning is the basis for growth, and growing is the key to living. I will seek first to understand, for understanding is the key to finding value, and value is the basis for respect, decisions, and action. This should be my first act with my wife, my family, and my business.

I want to help influence the future development of people and organizations. I want to teach my children and others to love and laugh, to learn and grow beyond their current bounds.

I will build personal, business, and civic relationships by giving, in frequent little ways.

The mission of our family is to create a nurturing place of order, love, happiness, and relaxation, and to provide opportunities for each person to become responsibly independent and effectively interdependent, in order to achieve worthwhile purposes.

Sample Mission Statement from <https://www.familybusinessmatters.consulting/>:

We are a family committed to our members and descendants being responsible, productive, well-educated citizens who practice the work ethic and make constructive contributions in the local community and the world at large. Each member is encouraged to develop and use self-supporting, marketable skills that contribute to the enhancement of their own self-esteem and independence.

We urge family members to adopt life styles that are healthy, personally satisfying and at such a profile as to preserve the maximum level of family privacy, given the public nature of our business.

We urge the continuation of the orientation of prudent, careful investing with a long-term view of outcomes so all of our descendants may enjoy the benefits of the foundation they built.

We believe clear, constructive communications are at the core of our long-term success as a family. We encourage all efforts to further harmony, develop humor and perspective on life. Balance long-term concerns while enjoying the present; and to enhance communications, caring and amicable relationships among family members.