

IT'S ALL ABOUT VISION!

What drives the vision of an association? Why do vision statements matter? Alessandro Cortese, member of the Union of International Associations (UIA) and CEO at European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology, shares his tips on how to make a snappy and effective vision statement.



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WHAT MAKES A GOOD VISION STATEMENT?

Ask yourself, "How will the world, or the relevant portion of it, look like in the future if your association is successful in achieving its long-term objectives?"

An effective vision statement is a promise from the organisation to its members; a belief that it is possible to make impact on a specific issue and change for better, together.

And therefore, the vision is the reason for the engagement of the members, rather than buying services or products.

If a vision is simply a picture of what the association and its leaders desire for a better future, it is then a statement of the values embraced by the association.

It is not about how or what. For that, you have a strategy. It's about why.

The reason why an association exists is usually expressed in the mission statement. What is the

association trying to achieve, in principle? Is it willing to eradicate a disease or a negative condition? Is it willing to effect a change in culture or mindsets? Is it about protecting a certain part of the population? Advancing a cause? Advocating for an industrial sector?

However, mentioning the purpose of your association is not enough to drive participation and motivate engagement.

With its vision, your association defines and describes a tangible outcome of being a relevant organisation supported by many stakeholders who share a coherent long-term goal.

It tells a story in which the main character is not the organisation or its leader, but the member with his or her values, beliefs and ambitions.

IN OTHER WORDS, WHY SHOULD ANYBODY CARE ABOUT YOUR ASSOCIATION? CAN THEY BELIEVE WHAT YOU BELIEVE? WHAT WILL THEY ACHIEVE IF THEY JOIN YOU?

It is also a question of value, as the famous Harvard Strategy Professor, Michael Porter, explained. In any field, value should be defined around the customer, not the supplier.

Porter said, "In any field, improving performance and accountability depends on having a shared goal that unites the interests and activities of all stakeholders. In most fields, the preeminent goal is value. The concept of value refers to the output achieved relative to the cost incurred. Defining and measuring value is essential to understanding the performance of any organisation

and driving continuous improvement".

A clear vision provides direction and establishes a purpose worthy of achieving or defending, as it refers to a set of values the members believe in. True values contain a deeper meaning, an application within the context of the association, and a sense of passion.

The values describe the culture of the organisation, or at least the ambition to change the culture of the association to fit the values that the members subscribe to. Without alignment between values and culture on one side, and mission and vision on the other side, the association will struggle to remain relevant and convince the members that it is worth engaging in it.

If the members do not feel that there is value created for them in the association, they will progressively look at the alternative sources of value that better correspond to their needs and beliefs.

There is no escape: an association must constantly communicate around its vision dynamically to remain relevant over time, embracing the values that members believe in and providing long-term value by vocalising about the impact that the association and its members will have.

Ultimately, the vision statement contributes to the essential function of defining what is called by Matthew Richter "an intrinsically motivating environment", which occurs when a person can excel by adhering to motivational factors found in the environment. Essentially, when the motivational factors are present, members have a perceived valuable choice to opt for.



SO, WHAT ARE THE RULES OF WRITING A STRONG VISION STATEMENT?

There are probably none. However, it is possible to draw up some guidelines that increase the chances of defining an effective vision statement. I would suggest focusing on two characteristics:

Firstly, a vision statement should be inclusive and suggestive, motivating members and stakeholders to join a common cause and describing what success will look like.

For instance:

SPECIAL OLYMPICS: To transform communities by inspiring people throughout the world to open their minds, accept and include people with intellectual disabilities and thereby anyone who is perceived as different.

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY: A world where everyone has a decent place to live.

Secondly, keep your vision statement succinct and yet very ambitious, in just one or two sentences. On average, a vision statement has less than 20 words. Clear words should be used to communicate a strong and clear goal for the future.

For instance:

OXFAM: A just world without poverty

ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION: A world without Alzheimer's

In conclusion, each association should have an effective vision statement that describes the picture of its impact in the future and embraces the values of its members. Each association should also constantly communicate to all its stakeholders around it, as this will serve as the basis of their engagement and motivation.

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