

Good morning. I'm John Woodcock with The Family Business Institute.

Today, I want to talk a little bit about the importance and the power of mission. Over the years, we've been hired by dozens of our clients to assist them with strategic planning. When we do that, we always start with mission. We start by asking the client, do they have a mission statement? And if they do, do they feel like it is really driving their business forward? Why do we start with mission? Well, we believe it defines the what and the why. What we are as a business, why we are doing what we do as a business. The strategy is about how, but if we're to develop a really effective strategy, we think we've got to be crystal clear about the mission, about who we are, what we are and why we're here.

We talk a little bit about a book I like, book is called, *It's Not What You Sell, It's What You Stand For*. It's written by fella out of Texas named Roy Spence. In his book, Roy talks about the proliferation of meaningless corporate mission statements. Why does he think so many are meaningless? Well it's really, for one reason, he said most of them are completely devoid of purpose. In fact, Roy goes as far to question the needing for a mission or a vision. He says what you need is a statement of purpose. Well, I like mission and vision and that may be a little bit tomato, tomato, or a question of semantics, but Roy does make a great point. He challenges the thinking.

So, what makes a great purposeful mission statement? Well, Roy gives us seven characteristics that I want to talk a little bit about this morning. Number one, he says it can't be generic. Most mission statements aren't much more than a claim about the category that the business is in wrapped up in a bunch of performance goals around things like profitability, employee retention, customer satisfaction, quality but they don't say much about what's really important, the difference the business is making. Number two, it's not a tagline. Spence says, prioritize clarity over creativity. Leave the creative for the rest of your marketing and branding material. Our colleague Bundy Bundesman likes to talk about the mission they had at McDevitt Street. Their mission was to identify, hire, train, and retain the very best talent.

That's definitely prioritizing clarity over creativity. It's interesting that it doesn't even mention the category that the business is in. But it was clear enough that it enabled McDevitt Street to grow from a 50-million-dollar contractor to a highly profitable contractor doing over a billion dollars' worth of work in a single decade. Three and this one is tough. Make it focused. We need to prune away all of the things that can clutter the message within the mission statement and suck the life out of it. In my former life, we actually hired Spence help us get clear about our mission. Our mission became to be the relentless ally for each and every dream we were entrusted to build. That was focused. That created clarity. Sure, profitability was important, relationships with clients and subcontractors, retention of our people were all critical to us. But when it came to making difficult choices, we always knew that we were more than anything about being the ally for the project.

Four, keep it simple. You might think you've got the greatest mission statement in the world that you've labored over and spent weeks developing. But what happens if you walk on a job site one day and want to talk to a dozen of your employees about it, and you ask them to tell you your mission and only two of them can answer you. Well, it's probably not making much of a difference in your organization. Compare that to the mission statement of Southwest, giving people the freedom to fly. That's simple. People can remember it. People can get enthused about it. And my guess is it directs almost every decision that business has made. I'm going to combine five and six. Aim high, but don't end up in the ether. The mission statement needs to inspire people to put their life's work into it, but they also need to understand it.

You could have the mission to make our city or the world a better place. Well, that's aiming high, but what does it mean? But if I compare that to the mission statement of the Red Cross, which is enabling Americans to perform extraordinary acts of service in the face of emergencies. That's very lofty, but it makes sense. And I think if you listen to it, you know that's what that organization does. Last, set the how aside. The is how is for the strategy, leave that for the strategic planning. The mission is about the different that you're going to make, not how you're going to do it. At FBI, our mission

is that *We Build Better Contractors*. We then can make strategic choices about how we do that. Investing in our bootcamp program or continuing to refine our performance round tables. We hope that you're thinking about your mission and purpose for your business.

It's easy to fall into the trap that it's a check the box exercise, or it's one of those things that's nice to have and we'll get to it when everything else that's more important, sort of gets done. But getting real about who you are and why you exist as a business that may be the best thing that you can do to attract and retain the people that are most passionate about what you're passionate about. Your mission should become your North Star, it'll enable you to strip away everything that's relevant and the nice to haves and the wish we could haves. Especially, when you're faced with making tough choices. Choices around hiring and firing, projects that you want to pursue or clients that you choose to work for.

Thanks for listening. As always, we love your feedback and welcome your comments.