

Organizational Purpose Pitfalls to Avoid | 090

What are some common organizational purpose pitfalls? And are you at risk of falling into any of them? Keep listening to find out.

Welcome to Lean Leadership for Ops Managers, the podcast for leaders in Ops Management who want to spark improvement, foster engagement, and boost problem solving - AND still get their day job done. Here's your host, Leadership Trainer, Lean Enthusiast, and Spy Thriller Junkie, Jamie V. Parker.

We are in this series on leading purpose at work. And last episode we learned two key points. First, that most people say that their sense of purpose is largely defined by their work. You see purpose from our families, from our passions, from our service and how we give all of these things outside of work. They are super important. They're core to who we are and our individual purpose. But purpose at work matters too. And we can't ignore that.

The second key thing we learned in the last episode is that there exists what Mackenzie calls a purpose hierarchy gap, where 85% of senior leaders say that they can live their purpose at work. All those other folks that aren't senior leaders, only 15% say that they can. This disconnect, this gap is a problem. And understanding these two key points leaves us with one thing, and that is that we have to make an intentional effort to lead purpose at work.

Now, when I talk about purpose in this series, I mean more than just a formal organizational purpose statement, you know, like the kind you might find on the website. I'm really referring to True North. So, yes, it does include the organization's formal purpose statement or vision statement. Absolutely. It's included, but it doesn't stop there.

It also includes our core values, our foundational values. And this is who we aspire to be, how we want to interact and behave with each other. It also is going to include some sort of goals or objectives or metrics, something that tells us how we're creating value. So when we talk about purpose in these episodes know that I'm really talking about that true north and something a little bit broader than just a purpose statement.

Now as I've explored how to lead with purpose, both with leaders at my client organizations and with colleagues and and leaders at other organizations, I've really come to find some organizational purpose

Organizational Purpose Pitfalls to Avoid | 090

pitfalls, some things that have shown up more than once. And as I talk you through these, I want you to think about your organization. But but not just your organization as a big whole organization. I want you to think of that really as your team, how you're communicating with and leading your team.

And so your next step from this episode is to evaluate your own leadership and communication against these potential purpose pitfalls that I'm about to walk you through. Now don't forget you can find the show notes at our website processplusresults.com/podcast and you will also find some links to other episodes that are related to leading purpose at work.

[00:03:54] As we talk through this, you know, pay attention to see which ones maybe your organization might be falling into and know that it's okay if you are. These are common. I call them common for a reason. But what that means is it's just a trigger that that may be a dialog you want to have as a leadership team is to talk about this a little bit further. Right. Pay attention so that you don't fall into one of these pitfalls and you're able to get out of it because you don't recognize it. The key is to recognize it. Even if you can't solve it immediately, at least recognize and say, oh, we need to watch out for that. All right.

Common purpose, pitfall number one. Too much stuff. We've got a vision and a mission and a purpose statement. And then we've got values and then we have principles. And then we have operating principles. And then we have our objectives. And then we have our strategic priorities. And then we have our KPIs and we have our secondary metrics, and then we have so much stuff. In fact, I had a client who was trying to kind of clarify what their true north was and what their purpose was. And they started by going out and pulling together what already exists. Like, let's not start from scratch, just pull together what already exists.

[00:04:57] And he came back with 37 pages worth of stuff from their website, from their intranet, from their executive report-outs, from the strategic plans, wherever it all came from. Way too much stuff. Great. So if you have too much stuff, you got to narrow.

Second pitfall, Scattered. We got something here. We got this one piece over here. We got this piece here, then we got this piece here, then we got this piece here. And no one actually knows, like, where it

Organizational Purpose Pitfalls to Avoid | 090

is. I had a client that I actually attended their new hire orientation because I really wanted to learn the organization and understand who they were and all of these pieces.

And what was fabulous is they had all of the components, right? The problem is it was a little bit scattered. They'd have this one piece in this slide over here that the president shared and then this other piece in this slide over here that the CEO shared, and then this other piece over here that the improvement team shared and quality team share. And they'd have they had all the components. But they didn't have one.

And so one of the first things I did with them or for them is I actually took all these components and I pulled it together to one slide. We have one slide, one image that has their purpose. It has their values, it has their true north metrics, it has their performance system and what those methods and principles are and has everything in one.

[00:06:17] So if you find yourself scattered, figure out how can we consolidate? And you might have two, you might have like one as the organization, and then one is leadership or one is the organization kind of long term. And then one is our strategic one year plan. And that's okay. You don't want it scattered all over the place.

Next one: vague language or corporate speak. Synergized holistic results driven. There's a website I'm actually pull it up. It's called John Hayworth and he has this mission statement generator. And it's a joke where like is like, let me just hit the button and tell you.

So here's an example. We will proactively engineer multimedia based opportunities to meet the needs of an ever changing marketplace. Let me generate another one. We can be relied upon to promote intellectual capital. What in the world does that mean? Right. How about one more ready? We collaboratively provide access to agile meta services without losing sight of our original goal to reliably integrate content.

Organizational Purpose Pitfalls to Avoid | 090

What do any of those mean? You don't know, right? Of course not. And that's a risk. That's a common pitfall, is that we have these fancy words, but it doesn't really tell us anything. That's not what we're going for.

So if you have that, even if you are working in an organization where that's what the purpose statement or the vision statement or the mission statement sounds like. You're like, but that's what I'm working on and I can't change that. I'm in a leadership role, but I'm not the CEO. I'm not the board of directors. I can't change that. That's okay, because what you can do is have that and then pull it down and say, okay, but what does this mean for us? And create your local level conversation and talking points. All right.

[00:07:59] Next up is compete without context. So you will always have competing priorities as an individual. You have competing priorities. You want to achieve certain financial goals for retirement, and you also want to go travel the world. Right. These are competing. The thing is, you use your values in order to decide and make decisions around those. And what happens is you're not going be able to get rid of competing priorities.

But we have to know the context from which lens do we look at these? How do we explore? How do we make decisions? How do we prioritize when they are competing? So if this is you, we're competing. We have competing priorities, but we don't have the context with which to understand them and figure out which way to go. Then you need to have a dialog about that as a leadership team.

[00:08:50] Next up, exclusive or not relevant. So this is when it's executives only, right? Like it's like, man, that's super relevant for executives. But it really doesn't mean anything to the folks on the front line or the folks leading the front line. Man, you know what? That's really great for, like, the company, but I can't directly impact that. I have no impact on this. Right. So if that's the case and you may not be able to change that from where you are in your organization, but you can always make it more relevant. You can always make it more inclusive.

Next one, it's not meaningful or it's not connecting. So here's what I mean by that, is we are if you have true north statements, true North kind of priorities that are all about the business, right? We are going to have returns for shareholders. We are going to grow to be the biggest. We're going to be number one,

Organizational Purpose Pitfalls to Avoid | 090

any of those that are all about what the business is going to achieve, that's not particularly meaningful to me. That's not particularly something I can connect with.

And so if we have that, we need to shift that. What's going to be the impact to clients or to customers? What's going to be the impact to the community? What's going to be the impact to the world? What's going to be the impact to our team members? What's going to be the impact to our team members families? And so if you just have like we're going to be the biggest, baddest number one, we're going to have the best stuff, the most stuff. And it's all about the business and the shareholder return and all of that. Then you haven't gone deep enough and you've got to figure out another another layer. But why to what end are you doing that?

[00:10:27] Next up, not practiced. So this is super common where we have posters on the wall, but it doesn't represent what's actually happening. When I was with an organization, they said one of the quality managers actually said this. He said, You know what? Like, this is great. In your new hire orientation, we talk about values and it's awesome, but we've got to get the values off the posters on the wall and onto the floor. Right.

And look, your true north is going to be aspirational. It's going to be things that you haven't yet fully achieved. And that's okay. So every time there's a disconnect isn't a problem, right? That's great when there's a gap because it tells us where we need to focus. But when it's like completely different, that is not the case. Right?

Good example. Have you ever looked up Enron's mission statement? Go look that one up. Go Google that one. Right. Because it's all about integrity and then it's Enron. I was like, what in the world? So we want to make sure that we practice, that we that that the things we prioritize are aligned. Right. We can't say that this is what we're here to do in our true north, but then prioritize all these other things that aren't relevant. We've got to practice it.

[00:11:42] And then the last one, inconsistent or unclear. So I worked with an organization. It was kind of a small company, maybe like 70 people or so. And the owner was really frustrated because the leadership team had gotten together and they had decided on their decision path. Right. When when we have this

Organizational Purpose Pitfalls to Avoid | 090

competing priorities, we've got contacts now to deal with it and we are going to make decisions in the order of this safety first, then quality, then customer delivery or service, and lastly, cost.

So this is what they decided together, that this is how they're going to make decisions. And then after that, things were happening and decisions were being made and the owner said, We're not following it. We agreed to this and we're not following this. People aren't making decisions based on safety first.

So I went in and I started having conversations, right? Like, Well, tell me about this and well, how did you decide? Right, and walk me through it. Right. And guess what? To the production manager. Safety was about safe working conditions, and it was focused primarily on physical safety. That's how he was prioritizing safety. That's how he was making decisions from safety. Well, the VP of operations, to him, safety was psychological safety. You see, the owner had a hot temper and he would lash out sometimes. And so the VP of operations felt the need to keep his team safe from those blow ups.

[00:13:16] And so that's how he was prioritizing safety. The VP of Sales, she viewed safety as what would deliver for the customer, what would keep the customer safe, meeting their demands. It would also keep her team safe because they're not getting yelled at. Right. They're not having to make calls and give bad news. That's unsafe. I've got to give bad news. Unsafe.

And then the owner, well, he viewed safety as the financial viability of a company, because if we're not financially viable, then people aren't employed and can't provide for their families. So here you have like we've given the contacts, we know how we're going to make these decisions, and yet every single person thought they were doing it and every single person had a different definition.

So here are common purpose pitfalls. You're finding that you are falling into any of these. It's okay. They're common. It just means you got to talk about it. You may not even be able to solve it right away, but you want to create awareness with your peer team, with your leader. So excited for these conversations that you're going to have with leaders, with peers, with team members about purpose at work. Now, keep listening to this series as we continue in the next episode talking about what do we do? What are some specific steps that you can take to help you lead purpose at work? Until next time.

Organizational Purpose Pitfalls to Avoid | 090