



Life Mission Statements and Process Statements

“The real adventure is the flow of time. It’s as much adventure as anyone could wish.”
—Anne Tyler

This unit will help you to clarify and live out your purpose, if you know it, or discover it if you don’t. By the time you’ve completed this unit, you will:

- Understand common mistakes people make about their life missions.
- Write a Personal Life Mission Statement.
- Understand what kind of work you need to do to move your mission forward.
- Write a Process Statement that will enable you to live out your mission.

Pretest

Directions: On another sheet of paper, answer these and all of the following questions.

1. Take three minutes and make a list of all the things you want. Include possessions, experiences, relationships...everything. Focus on the next six months, but go beyond that if time permits.

2. If you can, put your primary purpose in life (or mission) in a sentence or two. Finish either of the following statements:

My purpose in life is to ...

The thing that is the best, most loving use of my time is ...

3. How much of your available time during the last month were you actively working towards this mission or purpose? (You can count your work time if it's directly in line with your mission.)

- 75-100% of the time
- 50-75% of the time
- 25-50% of the time
- 0-25% of the time

4. Do you have a defined process for achieving this mission? (A process is not the same thing as a plan. It's a set of daily or weekly practices or routines for attaining and living the mission.)

5. How do you feel when you think about your mission and how well you're living it? For instance, in answering Questions 2 and 3, did you feel a negative emotion such as anxiety, sadness, or inadequacy, or a positive emotion such as enthusiasm or excitement?

What your answers mean

1. Many of the things you want, though good, can actually interfere with your primary mission or purpose. You may want to look back at each item and decide if it's getting in the way of deeper fulfillment.
2. Some people may have a hard time expressing their purpose. If you can't easily do this, Section Three should help you.
3. If you have a mission, but spend very little of your free time working toward it, you might ask yourself how serious you are about your mission. If, on the other hand, you spend almost all your time on your mission, you might ask yourself if you're too focused. You might possibly spend some of the time helping someone else with their mission.

4. While time is needed for working toward your mission, it helps to have a clearly defined process. Section Four on Process Statements will help you come up with an ongoing strategy for your mission.

5. Your feelings can be a measure of whether or not you're achieving your mission; but they might also give you a clue to some of your assumptions about having a mission. People make several incorrect assumptions about life mission that cause a lot of unnecessary pain. These are discussed in Section Two.

Part One: Why Have a Life Mission Statement? (Benefits of completing this unit.)

“Most of us die with our music still in us.” –Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.

Perhaps the purpose of your life is to express the best that’s inside you—your “music”—and also to experience the best that life has to offer. For many reasons, however, many people die with little fulfillment. Reflecting on your mission, writing it down, and creating a process for living it out are three steps that make personal success and fulfillment more likely to happen. Here are some other reasons for having a mission statement:

1. Having a purpose enriches life and creates drama. Because of a lack of role models when they were growing up, some people may never have thought they could actually set a direction or choose a purpose for their lives. Choosing a purpose that’s not too easy means entering into a drama, because you won’t know if you can succeed, nor will you know where your mission will take you. Not only does a good mission enrich you, but it enriches the world too.
2. Having a purpose increases self-esteem and meaning. To say you stand for something or someone gives increased meaning to your life. You must do more and be more. Just choosing to live for something increases self-esteem; and if you have successes along the way, your self-esteem will increase even more.
3. Having a defined purpose helps you make the best use of your time, as well as opportunities as they happen. Many people want to do too many things, and they end up spreading themselves too thin. This gives them less of a chance for fulfillment and a greater chance of wasting time and resources. If you can make a choice that focuses your energies, you’re much better off. Even if you make the wrong choice, and put your heart into it, you’ll quickly realize it and be able to choose again. If you don’t choose, you might spend your whole life stuck in between your options. If you make a clear choice, on the other hand, you’ll be primed for opportunities and be able to take advantage of them, rather than letting them pass by.
4. Having a defined mission and sense of purpose simplifies life and lowers stress. If you have a clear sense of purpose, you can more easily say no to many tantalizing opportunities—things that would be nice, but would pull you off center. This also lowers stress because you’re less overwhelmed by the options (since you can sift through them more rapidly.) Life becomes less complicated.
5. Having a defined mission helps you focus and avoid distractions. It’s like having a star to steer by. People who know what they’re about are better able to concentrate and be more effective. When someone makes a request or an offer that doesn’t relate to your mission, just saying something like, “I’m sorry but my main focus is....” This will tend to discourage them because you’re able to give them a firm, resolute answer.

Part Two: Common Mistakes and Assumptions about Life Missions

“Lifted out of my wheelchair of assumptions, I found that I could stand.” –Tim Cimino

People often make incorrect assumptions about their mission in life, or about how to achieve fulfillment. These assumptions can cause a lot of pain or lost opportunity. Here are some examples:

- * It’s an assumption to believe that everyone has a predetermined mission. While many people experience that they were “born” to do a certain thing in life, there’s no proof that everyone has a set mission in life. Perhaps some people never have a fixed mission.
- * It’s an assumption to feel guilty or inadequate if one doesn’t clearly know his or her mission early in life. What they must remember is that their mission may develop or unfold later in life.
- * It’s an assumption to think we have just one mission or purpose in life at a time that never changes.
- * Related to this, it’s an assumption to think your mission in life never changes.
- * It’s an assumption to believe your mission always involves *doing* something. Why couldn’t it just as easily be entering into a certain kind of relationship, or *being* a certain kind of person? Why couldn’t the mission be not what you do, but the way you do it?
- * It’s an assumption to think your mission has to be something special or unique. Maybe some people have the mission of raising children, or of being a good friend.
- * It’s an assumption to think your mission must always involve giving or producing something. Giving makes no sense if no one has the mission to receive or appreciate the giving.
- * It’s an assumption to think you must do your mission for money, professionally, or not at all. If you enjoy it deeply, then money, fame, and having an audience are secondary considerations. Perhaps you can do it as a hobby or as a volunteer, and later get paid part-time or full-time.
- * It’s an assumption to think you have to do something perfectly, or finish it. This assumption can prevent some people from pursuing their dreams because they feel they’re not good enough, or they believe it’s too late in life to start.
- * It’s an assumption to think that if you have a mission, you automatically have the resources to realize it. Unfortunately, many in this world don’t have the resources to manifest their dream, through no fault of their own.

* It's an assumption to think that once all your time has been committed you don't need to think about mission any more. You can always deepen your mission by increasing the *quality* of your presence as you live out each commitment.

* It's an assumption to think that once you have begun to live your mission, you will always be happy and never have another problem again.

Exercise 1: A. Look back at the previous assumptions and write down any assumptions you're making about your mission. B. List the consequences of making each assumption you've been making: how you've felt; how you've acted; and how others have treated you.

Part Three: Defining, Refining, and Extending Your Mission

"The things in life to go after are the things you don't have to chase." –Tim Cimino

Defining Your Life Mission

Exercise 2: Answer the following questions to help you define a mission. Answer each question before moving on to the next one. Please be extraordinarily honest with yourself.

1. How fulfilled do you feel at this time in your life?
2. Based on how you used your spare time over the last four months, what kind of fulfillment is most important to you? (For example: professional, personal relationships, emotional, spiritual-ethical, etc.)
3. Based on any recurring negative feelings over the last four months, what kind of fulfillment are you lacking and do you desire most?
4. Of all the accomplishments in your life, which makes you feel the happiest and most satisfied?

5. What makes you feel most enthusiastic and alive? What gives you a sense of fulfillment and joy?

6. If you just had four months to live, what would you do with the time?

7. Thomas Merton wrote:

“...if you want to identify me, ask me not where I live, or what I like to eat, or how I comb my hair, but ask me what I am living for, in detail, and ask me what I think is keeping me from living fully for the thing I want to live for.”

So, what are you living for, and what is keeping you from living fully for the thing you want to live for? Please take at least five minutes to write your response before continuing.

8. Please finish this sentence: “More than anything else in the world, what I want is...”

(If you’re completely stuck, you can choose something like “actively exploring life to find out what my mission is.”)

9. What feelings do answering these assessment questions bring up?

Shortly, you’ll be asked to write a draft of your mission statement. Before you do, here are a few models and examples to consider:

a. The General and Specific Model. This contains two parts—a general part that rarely changes, and a specific part that may someday change. Example: “My mission is to work in nature for its protection—specifically, to protect the Delaware river basin through river patrols and research.”

b. The Practical and Ideal Model. This mission contains both what you need to do in life (since you’ve taken on certain responsibilities) plus the things you’d love to do. Example: “My mission is to raise my two children to be mature, wise adults, and to write and perform rock music in a band.”

c. The Values and Roles Model. This contains the ideal that you want to live, and names the roles in which you will embody the ideal. Example: "I stand for kindness and service through the following roles: daycare worker, parent of Gina, member of the outreach committee of my church, citizen of the United States, and Christian."

Exercise 3: Writing your mission statement. Based on questions 1-9 above, and your answer to question two in the pretest, make your best attempt to write a mission statement. You can use any language or model you like, or finish either of the following sentences: "My mission in life is..." "The best, most loving use of my time is..." Note that this is a first draft. You'll get a chance to revise this later.

Refining your mission

Now that you have a tentative mission, you will want to refine it. Which of the following most closely fits your current situation?

* Exploring.

___ You still have no idea at all what your mission is, or what would be the best most loving use of your time. Or if you do have an idea, you have only a hint, such as "something to do with business" or "something to do with helping people."

___ You have a strong hunch of what your mission is.

In either of the above cases, you may need to try new things to see how they feel. Options include counseling, volunteering, part-time jobs, taking courses or seminars to experience many new things. At the same time, you may want to build up your basic skills so you're able to be effective at whatever your mission turns out to be.

* Deciding.

___ You're stuck between two or more options that strongly attract you. You sense that you need to make a choice between them.

There's an important insight that often can help one make a good choice. Someone's true mission is often related to how they played on their own as a young child *before* are encouraged to develop other interests that their parents praise them for. Here's a true story that illustrates what often happens:

Tim enjoyed making up stories as a young child. Ever since he can remember, he wanted to write stories when he got older. When he was young, however, his parents encouraged

him to study science and gave him a chemistry set. He was interested in it, and became good at science at school. He became a chemist and was successful, but didn't find deep satisfaction in it. It happened that he wrote a funny story for a friend. The story grew and he found that he enjoyed writing much more than science. He began to write more and more, left his job as a chemist, and now considers himself a writer.

In this case the conflict is between what you enjoy *naturally*, and the enjoyment and skills that you *acquire* or learn. Often you're praised by others for some practical skill you've acquired. Your primary mission, however, usually relates more to how you played on your own when you were a child.

Other insights might be gained through counseling, or through actually living each of the missions for a short time to experience them.

* Embracing.

___ You know what your mission is, but you're not living it. You haven't taken it seriously, or are afraid of taking the risk.

___ You have had a new insight into what your mission is, and you're eager to begin the change/adjustment process.

In either of these cases, the thing to do is simply to begin to live your mission. If you're afraid of taking a big step, you might take a smaller one. Or you might determine what's at the root of your fear and address it.

* Purifying.

___ You knew your mission before starting this unit but are experiencing some turmoil or conflict.

Perhaps you have a new mission developing; or possibly you have developed some attachments or negative attitudes that are compromising the quality of your mission. Once people become somewhat successful at their missions, they may need to examine themselves to determine if their desire for money, fame, recognition, or power is contaminating their mission.

“At every moment you choose yourself. But do you choose *yourself*? Body and soul contain a thousand possibilities out of which you can build many I's. But only in one of them is there a congruence of the elector and the elected. Only one—which you will never find until you have excluded all the superficial and fleeting possibilities of being and doing with which you toy, out of curiosity or wonder or greed, and which hinder you from casting anchor in the experience of the mystery of life, and the consciousness of the talent entrusted to you which is your *I*.” —Dag Hammarskjöld

* Nurturing.

___ You knew your mission before starting this unit and have been living it.

Just continue to nurture yourself by studying things that help you with your mission, meeting and sharing with people with related missions, and removing obstacles to help you live your mission more fully.

“I would like to beg you to have patience with everything unresolved in your hearts and try to love *the questions themselves* as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don’t search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. *Live* the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.” –Rainer Maria Rilke

Exercise 4: Choose the situation that most closely matches your own from the above options. Then write a few sentences about what you think would be the best way to pursue your mission. Next, take action! Taking action will clarify your mission for you in a way that written questions never can. This is because they give you new information about yourself.

Extending your mission

Sometimes people define their missions too narrowly, or too rigidly. Consider adding the following phrases to your mission statement. One very important point, however, is that if you choose to include them in your mission, each phrase must be backed up with a commitment of time spent on a regular basis. Otherwise they are high-sounding but empty words devoid of any reality.

* “To appreciate life.” As noted above, life is not always giving, part of it is receiving. To paraphrase the quote from Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., “Most of us die with our music still in us and other music still outside us.”

* “To live for the journey and not just the destination.” This means to be present to the day to day process, and to enjoy the moment to moment experience, and not just be focused on the final accomplishing of your mission.

* “To build my capacity” or “To keep learning.” Many people who have a dream, may

not have the skills and resources to live their dream or mission. So, building their capacity becomes a necessary part of being able to realistically have what it takes to live their mission. For instance, someone may have two children and want to take up painting, but have no time or training. Building their capacity could mean finding the money for classes and the time to do the painting.

* “To empower others.” Just about everyone has received help, training, and support from others, so it seems that passing it on is only fair.

* “To take care of myself.” To live your mission, you need to take care of your physical, mental and emotional health and maintain your key personal relationships.

* “To do my share to maintain our mutual life-support systems.” While some people have special missions to take care of the environment, the economy, the political system, and the community, we all probably have some responsibilities in these areas, because they could never be maintained by specialists alone.

* “To gracefully accept interruptions and make the best of them.” Rather than see obstacles and interruptions as blocks to our mission, we can accept dealing with them as part of our mission. Acknowledging and accepting them makes them less bothersome and stressful. Also, what may be an interruption to you might be a necessary part of someone else achieving their mission. An old Zen proverb says, “The obstacle is the path.”

* “To be open to changes in my mission.” Your mission might evolve, or you might be presented with a completely new one.

Once again, these don’t necessarily need to be added to your mission statement in writing. It’s useful, however, to consider how they extend and broaden your mission. You might want to have a short version of your mission—one or two sentences—that you can tell others, and a longer, more complete version for your own use.

Exercise 5: Underline or circle any of the extensions you might want to add to your mission. Then write a short version of your mission, and a longer version.

Part Four: Creating and Activating Your Process Statement

“Small transformations add up!” –Tim Cimino

Once a mission is defined, a process to attain that mission needs to be defined. Just as the mission statement is broader than a goal, the process statement is broader than a plan. It’s a lifetime or long-range process or set of routines for living out the mission. Ongoing change requires ongoing support; and ongoing growth requires ongoing nurturing. That’s why a process statement is a powerful tool for attaining one’s mission.

An effective process statement may need to have some or all of the following:

- Some ongoing personal support, or some form of emotional support (such as the Buddy System or Goal & Growth Group.)
- A means of learning new information (such as Internet news groups.)
- A means of getting feedback on how you’re doing (such as peer review.)
- Periodic evaluation (such as a weekly review process.)
- A regular time each day or week to work at your mission (such as an hour each morning before you start your day.)

Note that if you have any extensions to your mission, they should somehow be embodied in your process. For instance, if you include the phrase “to empower others” or “to build my capacity,” then you’ll need to devote some time or effort regularly to make these a real part of your mission.

Here are some examples of process statements:

“The process by which I intend to live out my mission is to spend 15 minutes early each morning working on the physical, mental, spiritual and social parts of my life.”

“The process by which I intend to live out my mission is to draw up a daily list of things to do, and spend at least two hours on the top priority or priorities until they’re done.”

“The process by which I intend to live out my mission is daily use of my journal, plus daily study of materials relating to my mission, each for one-half hour a day.”

“The process by which I intend to live out my mission is bi-monthly attendance at a Goal

& Growth Group, plus spend four hours every Sunday afternoon working on my goals.”

Exercise 6: Writing out a process statement.

- a. Re-read your mission statement.
- b. Write down what your current process is. In other words, what are you already doing? What are your regular forms of support, challenge, feedback, and evaluation?
- c. Decide if your current process is an adequate means for attaining or living out your mission. If it's not adequate, determine exactly where it falls short.
- d. Write a new process statement, making changes (additions and deletions) to your old process statement as needed.

Exercise 7: Share your mission with others. Once you've created your mission, it's important to share it with two groups of people—those close to you, and those who can help you attain it. Think of at least three people who would be sympathetic to your mission and tell them about it—not necessarily as you've written it, but in language that's appropriate. Perhaps you might tell them about any recent insights you've had, or about your new process statement. If appropriate, ask for their help or support.

Exercise 8: Activating your mission and process. For four weeks, re-read your mission and put into practice your process. Make any adjustments to your mission or process as needed.