

MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS

The following is an excerpt on **Strategic Planning** from:
Strategic Planning for Faith-based Schools

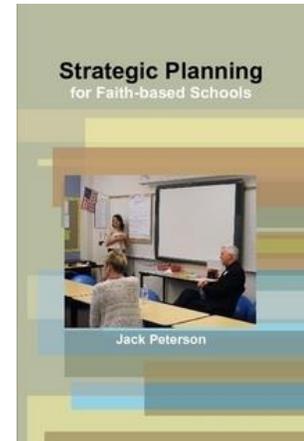
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Chapter 2: The First Steps of Strategic Planning

Of course there are many ways to do [strategic planning](#). The following chapters are intended to outline the most important steps in the order that I find generally makes sense. But there may be good reasons for skipping a step, adding one, or changing the order. In offering this list, I'm hoping to give readers a starting point from which they can determine their own process.

Confirmation of the Mission Statement.

Since the Strategic Plan's purpose is to support the school's mission, the formulation or major revision of the plan is a good time to revisit the school's Mission Statement to see if it still articulates what the school is about.

The Mission is the reason the school came into being and remains in being. It should be possible to state the mission simply. When I first began working with our school's planning process in the early 1980's, our mission statement was four paragraphs. We thought it was fairly succinct compared to the two page "Philosophy Statement" that we drew from. But it sat on a shelf and was difficult to remember or even reference in going about our work. So in the 1990's we decided it needed to be boiled down and came up with the following: "Our mission is to proclaim the Gospel message within an educational community and to graduate students who are leaders in action, modeled on Christ, and committed to the transformation he envisions for the world." This was a statement someone could memorize and slip into speeches and articles, put on signs, or use as a lens when considering a particular decision. And to my knowledge only two people actually did memorize it. So in the 2000's we came up with a one-word version of the mission: "Transformation." We were in the business of transforming students along the lines of the Gospel, and having them become transformational people in the world. It didn't make our school unique, because many institutions share that mission. But it did capture why we were in business. No transformation, no reason to exist. Successful transformation, successful school.

There are other statements, apart from the Mission Statement, which institutions need to make about themselves. These statements are closely related to mission, and therefore often find their way into the Mission Statement itself. This has the consequence of weighting it down, making it difficult to remember and obscuring the essential task for which the school exists. If you were

the captain of an army battalion and in the heat of battle, with ordnance exploding around you, you received the message from the command, “Take the hill,” that becomes your mission. If your troops then ask you what the mission is and you answer the question with how you will take the hill or why, you will have made it more difficult for them to understand what your battalion has been asked to do. The Mission Statement needs to answer the question, “What are we supposed to be doing?” There are other worthy questions to be addressed, but these should be answered in separate statements, which might include the following:

Vision Statements. This statement answers the question, “What will it look like when we get there?” It turns an abstraction, like “transformation,” into something the imagination can grasp: “200 graduates going into the world each year to take on leadership in their professions, in the Church, in families and communities and set the world on fire with their competence, conscience and compassion.” It is critical that the president and other leaders of the school continually translate the mission into sensory, emotional and inspiring stories that allow people to visualize what does not yet exist but could, if the mission were accomplished. Engineering school-wide, strategic change is hard work, especially at the beginning when palpable results come slowly. A vision of the longed-for reality can sustain the motivation to persevere through the tedious early stages.

Values Statements. How will the school go about accomplishing its mission? We are not referring here to implementation steps, but rather, what values will guide how the school goes about its task. Examples might be: “We will encourage the responsible use of freedom given our students by their Creator.” Values might address the importance of honesty in the school's dealings, or a special regard for the poor, or the use of participative processes and subsidiarity. The statement of the school's values alerts itself and others that, while accomplishing the mission is our focus, we are bound by certain principles that might not be self-evident in that mission.

Identity Statements. The identity of a school is what it is, as opposed to what it's supposed to be doing, or how it goes about doing it. For instance, the school's mission may be transformation, but it doesn't transform people the way a parish might, or a spirituality center or a political action committee. It is a school, and that is fundamental to its identity. Furthermore it may be a Catholic school, a Jesuit school and a college preparatory school. Within that, it may be a Cristo Rey School. So its mission is incarnate in a special kind of organization and it is important for its internal and external constituencies to understand what that means. Do non-Catholic employees (or Catholic ones for that matter) really understand what it means to be a Catholic school? Do current parents understand what it means to be a Jesuit school? Do the prospective parents who desire only that their son's education be Christian really understand what it means to be a college preparatory school? Rather than assume that they do, we should articulate what this means in writing and incorporate into the school's communications a strategy for ongoing education about it.