



# Purpose is the “Why” of Everything a Business Does

Purpose drives mission and vision and goes right to the heart of a business. Leaders with Purpose understand the “why” of a business and attract others who believe the same.

Why does one company succeed and another fail when they have similar or almost identical products, the same talent level, and work in the same markets and industry? The answer is not simply leadership. The answer is that the successful company has leadership with Purpose and the expression of that Purpose attracts others who believe the same way, creating an energetic, creative, and cohesive whole. Purpose is the “why” a business exists in the first place. Unless leaders are able to define and communicate it, the business may discover it expends a lot of effort and money on actions at odds with each other.

Purpose precedes and drives the vision and mission because it provides the direction and compels people and companies forward to achieve greater excellence. The vision is a concrete description of the end destination the business has in mind at moments in time. The mission describes a basic map of how the company will achieve its vision. Purpose is the very soul of a company.

The most inspiring leaders begin with a purpose and not an end goal. Peter Drucker was alluding to this fact when he said, “One does not begin with answers. One begins by asking, ‘What are our questions?’” Why do we exist? What are the world’s challenges we can meet? How are we different and what is our “best”? These questions encourage thinking beyond the business and without limits. Purpose is a greater concept that defines the core nature of a company and reflects its culture, values, and the capabilities of its talent, and this is precisely where it can get tricky. Inspirational leaders connect Purpose to the business challenges and are able to communicate the result, attracting people who believe in the same purpose and what to be a part of the process.

## Challenging the Status Quo

The best way to understand Purpose is to look at a company like Apple that has clearly defined its Purpose. Most companies market products to consumers by describing their designs and functions. Apple attracts consumers by sharing the company’s Purpose and drawing in those who share that Purpose and want to participate. The slogan, “Think Different” is a good example. Notice that it does not say “Apple thinks different”. Over the



years, the ad copies have said “Never been there. Never done that.” and “Solving life’s dilemmas one app at a time.” and “Just follow your Apple”. The founder of Apple, Steve Jobs, did not start the business to achieve a monthly sales figure and was not in the business of building a computer empire. He wanted to challenge the status quo, do things differently, and go where no other company has been, and in the process, solve the average consumer’s life dilemmas.

In the book *Purpose: The Starting Point of Great Companies*, Nikos Mourkogiannis explores the source of inspirational leadership.\* He proposes that effective leaders develop teams with people who are bound together by Purpose and are able to work together without politics or self-serving perspectives. He defined four Character Archetypes typically found in businesses: Magicians, Lovers, Sovereigns, and Warriors. Each approaches challenges in different ways and blending the differences on a team can lead to outstanding results.

Steve Jobs was a magician who could get on stage and pull a “computer rabbit” out of the hat, inspiring people to think beyond what they could see at the moment. When he was introducing a new product, it was not the current product people adored. Jobs could magically make people believe in what was coming next. Consumers bought the current product so that they were aligned to buy the next innovation. They believed in the purpose of Apple to challenge the status quo.

The Lover archetype is more interested in building coalitions based on feelings connected to Purpose. Lover archetypes on teams like to reach agreement on innovative ideas and actions that are embedded in Purpose. Sovereigns are defined as “Big Picture” team members. To them, going in the right direction is considered action. They are focused on where decisions and actions are leading and whether they support the Purpose. Then there are Warriors, who concentrate on things like facts, accountability, fairness, and accomplishments. Comparing the styles of Apple’s Steve Jobs and Microsoft’s Bill Gates is a vivid example of a Magician versus a Warrior. Gates is serious, factual, and driven by accomplishments.

The most effective teams have carefully chosen representatives of the four archetypes, who bring a diversity of perspectives. Inspirational leaders help them think from the inside out, radiating out from Purpose to vision and mission. When actions are taken, they emanate from Purpose. When actions are not Purpose driven companies eventually wear themselves out introducing new strategies, products, and marketing, in a misguided attempt to find direction through action.

[Ideas Make Great Companies](#)



One of the mistakes companies make is trying to attract the “most talented” or “most educated” employees. Hiring people because they can do a job leads to people who work for money. They complete their jobs like they are making checkmarks on a to-do list. They are simply in it for the money or prestige. When a company hires people who embrace the Purpose of a company, a team is more likely to generate new ideas, leading to strategic initiatives that might represent a shift in direction but that always adhere to the Purpose of the company. Initiatives that falter are quickly amended, so the business never gets off track.

Leaders hold positions of authority but that does not ensure success. Mourkogiannis proposes that companies must define themselves by a set of values that reflect Purpose and inspire and motivate employees. It is ideas and not just actions that make companies great. To generate those ideas and energize a business, leaders must be able to inspire with Purpose. The balance of Purpose driven archetypes on teams promotes the development of initiatives that avoid action for the sake of action. Leaders that attract others who have the same Purpose can keep an organization’s people and strategies aligned.

\* Nikos Mourkogiannis. (October 1996). Purpose: The Starting Point of Great Companies. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.