

# Margo Johnson — Alignment on a vision

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Margo Johnson

Editor's note: As part of its business package, the Gaylord Herald Times now features "Scoring in Business." Written by Northern Michigan volunteers with the SCORE

business mentoring organization, the column series topics of interest to current and prospective small business operators. SCORE's Tip of the Mitt chapter, which is based in Petoskey and recently added a branch in Gaylord, is made up of volunteers with a variety of business backgrounds who offer free, confidential mentoring services to the small business community. To learn more about SCORE's local programs, call the Otsego County Economic Alliance at (989) 731-0287.

Embarking on a business or nonprofit venture is exciting, exhilarating and even a bit frightening. It's even more exciting to have it up and running. You've taken the risk and accepted the unrelenting workload. But where are you going? Are your employees going to the same place?

Even if you have no employees, your organization needs to have a purpose. You want to be known as someone who stands for something — someone with a vision. If you do have employees, they want to be part of something they can relate to and support. This is especially true for younger generations. They want to be proud of what they do and why they are doing it. Although there are many benefits to having a mission and vision, attracting and retaining a quality workforce is near the top.

How do you do that? Where do you start? Lots of help is available, with a little research, on how to develop a vision. Assuming you have a mission statement, you've answered the question, "why do we exist." You've identified your core competencies that will help carry out the mission. You've shared this with employees, customers and the community so they know what is driving you to deliver your excellent product or service.

Why do you need more? Your organization's vision is the ultimate future state of your endeavor. It serves as the inspiration and guides your strategic and business planning. It is used internally to drive you and your employees to achieve. You also need to make sure it's communicated and bought into and that everyone is on the same page to deliver. It's a big undertaking — an iterative process that is never completed.

It's helpful to first know what employees' understanding is of why the organization exists and how engaged they are in their work there. A simple climate survey will identify the current state. Then, once you roll out the vision, take the pulse from time to time to make sure people are aligned and engaged in working toward it.

It's important that employees have a sense of how their roles support the larger goals of the organization. Make sure they understand exactly the link between what they do and how that helps achieve the mission and contributes toward the vision. Sometimes it can be a simple explanation; other times they need facts and statistics. However you explain it, you should always be creating excitement about the organization, its course and the end result.

Listen to employees when they talk about the product or service and about what's going on in their part of the organization. Believe it or not, even complaining is an indication of good engagement. Just make sure you understand and act on their comments, which reinforces your commitment.

Tie individual and team goals to achieving the mission and progressing toward the vision. Your whole performance management and reward/recognition system should support the organization's direction. Include employees in decision making. Developing and analyzing plans for near- and long-term strategies and proposals keeps engagement high and reinforces alignment on the direction of the organization.

Make sure you monitor your business' progress and admit to your problems. If you have employees, always keep them informed on progress and issues and get their help in problem-solving. A well-informed workforce is happier and more productive — and creative in identifying solutions. And celebrating progress increases momentum toward the vision.

Whether all this is an effort for you or just comes naturally, remember that development and communication of your vision is key to establishing a quality reputation and positive work environment. Your organization can become an employer of choice for those who

want to have passion and commitment for what they do and to have positive impact in their community. To the extent employees are not engaged and committed to the vision, poor customer service, low morale and missed business opportunities will result.

Margo Johnson filled a variety of human resource management roles in the automotive industry, and now chairs SCORE's Tip of the Mitt chapter.