



# Using Your Personal Mission Statement to INSPIRE and Achieve Success

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AN ESSENTIAL PART of professional development in academic medicine is taking time to reflect on our personal goals and success in achieving these goals. One effective mechanism to translate these reflections into action is the development of a personal mission statement. The business and health care industries rely on mission statements to establish a strategic vision and measure the effectiveness of an organization. Writing a personal mission statement can similarly be helpful for those in academic medicine to guide our professional development. In this article, we describe a framework (INSPIRE) for building a personal mission statement, which we have used for participants in the Association of Pediatric Program Directors' Leadership in Educational Academic Development (APPD LEAD) program.

In the 1960s, businesses started to develop mission statements as a more formalized approach to translate the goals of the organization into action.<sup>1</sup> A good mission statement is one that drives a business to achieve its goals by clearly expressing the organization's vision, business domain, competencies, and values.<sup>2</sup> Successful mission statements describe the values that guide and inspire organizations,<sup>1</sup> provide the necessary backdrop against which the merit of alternative strategies can be properly evaluated, and communicate those values and strategies to internal and external stakeholders.<sup>2–4</sup>

In the 1990s, health care organizations began developing mission statements and using them to develop business plans and organizational goals.<sup>5,6</sup> Mission statements helped nonprofit organizations stay focused on their purpose and direction.<sup>6</sup> Well written mission statements have a positive association with organizational performance in business<sup>4</sup> as well as nonprofit health care organizations.<sup>3</sup>

In the early 2000s, personal mission statements were promoted as a way for individual health care professionals to stay focused on their purpose and direction.<sup>7–11</sup> There are 2 important differences between the mission statements we create for ourselves and those developed

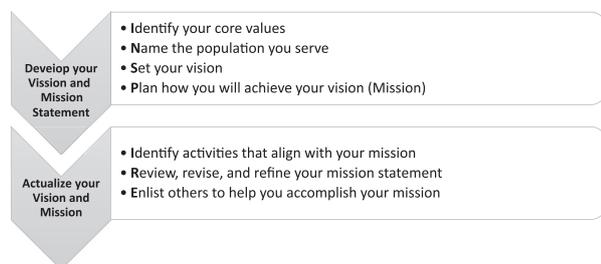
by organizations. Most importantly, personal mission statements speak to our personal values even more strongly than do organizational statements. Knowing what is important to us is the first step in developing a personal mission statement. Second, personal mission statements are more likely than organizational statements to change over time. In the continuum from medical student, to junior faculty, to assuming a leadership role, your perspectives change as does your potential effect on others and the environment. As a result, your personal mission will change, perhaps becoming more specific, perhaps being directed to a broader population, but always looking forward in your professional development.

## INSPIRE

Building on previous literature,<sup>1,8,9,12</sup> we propose a framework for developing a personal vision and mission statement to INSPIRE yourself and inform others, and provide practical tips on how to actualize your vision/mission statements (Fig). Qualitative feedback from the APPD LEAD Cohort about developing personal vision/mission statements using INSPIRE has been positive and includes the following: "INSPIRE strategy is useful;" "Consider projects, jobs, and assignments on how they contribute to what I want to do and what brings joy to me;" "Thinking and documenting goals, over prescribed time periods, can be useful to achievement of the goals—eliminating or declining things, without guilt, to achieve one's mission;" "It is very challenging, but important, to have a sense of your vision and mission before just completing goals;" and, "I had a bit of an 'Aha' moment when doing this exercise. This is incredibly important for my personal development. I look forward to sharing this with my chief."

## IDENTIFY YOUR CORE VALUES

The first step involves reflection and introspection. As described by Pololi et al<sup>13</sup> and Lieff,<sup>12</sup> the connection between identifying core values and career planning is



**Figure.** INSPIRE framework for developing and actualizing your personal vision and mission statement.

crucial. Identify core values that underlie your decisions, guide your actions, and influence how you view success (**Box**). Be authentic. No one else can determine your core values for you. Core values are a consistent part of yourself and do not change according to circumstances, setting, or activity. To help you define your core values, write down your proudest accomplishments—what is the common thread that links these accomplishments? Why are you most proud of these accomplishments? What do they say about you? Who are your role models? What characteristics do you most admire in these individuals? Narrow your core values to a maximum of 3 to 5 values on which to focus.<sup>8</sup> Your core values define what you believe in and are the lens through which you view the world.<sup>9</sup>

For example, someone who values innovation might embrace the opportunity to make changes in their education program; encourage innovation in their learners, faculty, and staff; include curricula on innovation and change management in their program; and view a successful program as one that graduates innovative leaders. In contrast, someone who values community might explicitly include curricula, rotations, and projects on community health in their residency program, and view a successful program as one that graduates residents who partner with community resources to improve the health of children in their community.

### NAME THE POPULATION YOU SERVE

Next, name the population you serve—pediatric residents at your program, pediatric fellows at your institution, medical students at your school of medicine, underserved children and families in your region, or pediatric medical educators nationally. By defining your scope and the population you desire to affect, you can better focus your mission statement.<sup>2</sup>

### SET YOUR VISION

Think big. As Stephen Covey states in his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, “begin with the end in mind.”<sup>14</sup> What is your vision for a better world? What is the change you want to make in the world? Imagine what

the world would look like if you had the effect that you desire on the population you serve. One way to create your vision is to visualize yourself at your retirement party, celebrating your successes with your friends and colleagues. What did you accomplish? Your vision is what the world will look like after you have accomplished the changes you want to make. For example, your vision might be “All children will receive personalized, evidence-based pediatric care.”

### PLAN HOW YOU WILL ACHIEVE YOUR VISION

Next, plan how you will achieve your vision—this is the essence of your mission statement. For example, if your vision is that “All children will receive personalized, evidence-based pediatric care,” your mission might then be “To educate learners to provide personalized, evidence-based care to children.”

What is the big, hairy, audacious goal (BHAG) that you need to accomplish to allow you to accomplish your mission?<sup>15</sup> What are some of the challenges you need to overcome and how do you turn those challenges into achievements? Break your BHAG into smaller goals along the way and plan how to achieve one goal at a time. For example, if your goal is to integrate evidence-based medicine curriculum and care into the continuum of education at your institution, you might find that to accomplish this goal, your 10-year goal might be to integrate evidence-based medicine into training of pediatric residents nationally, which might mean your 5-year goal might be to integrate evidence-based medicine into all aspects of the training of pediatric residents at your institution and your 1-year goal might be to develop a robust evidence-based medicine curriculum for pediatric residents in your institution. Identify the goals that you will need to achieve to meet your BHAG and establish a path that will allow you to achieve those goals.

### IDENTIFY ACTIVITIES THAT ALIGN WITH YOUR MISSION

What are activities that align with your mission and allow you to achieve your goals? Organizational mission statements help focus the allocation of organizational resources.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, you should use your mission statement to help focus the allocation of your time and energy. A study reported that faculty who spent at least 20% of their time on the activity they perceived as most meaningful to them were less likely to be burned out.<sup>16</sup> These meaningful activities might be described as “flow” states, an optimal state of intrinsic motivation, where you are “in the zone” and happily, fully absorbed in doing something meaningful to you, skillfully and easily.<sup>17</sup> As you sort through your current activities and the myriad opportunities available to you, determine how well each activity aligns with your mission or can provide you with the skills, experience, or connections necessary to achieve your goals. Give yourself permission to say “no” to opportunities that do not align with your mission so that you have room to actively seek out opportunities that do align. For example, as a medical educator, you might choose to

### BOX. EXAMPLES OF CORE VALUES

Balance	Collaborative	Competency	Dedication
Diversity	Evidence-based	Fairness	Hard work
Inspiration	Integrity	Nurture	Respect

further your skills locally and nationally (eg, APPD LEAD,<sup>18</sup> Academic Pediatric Association's Educational Scholar's Program,<sup>19</sup> Masters of Medical Education).

### REVIEW, REVISE, AND REFINE YOUR MISSION STATEMENT

Developing a personal mission statement is an iterative process. You will learn a great deal about yourself in the process. Mission statements are not meant to be static statements that sit on your shelf to be forgotten. They are to be continually reviewed, and revised on the basis of your current passions, and refined so that they can be easily remembered and acted upon.<sup>6</sup> A study reported that 48% of nonprofit hospitals reviewed/revised their mission statement within the past year, 73% within the past 2 years, and 85% within the past 5 years.<sup>6</sup> Revisit your mission statement on a regular basis, perhaps annually. At a minimum, you should revisit your mission statement when you have a change in your role, or when your passions or goals change. Continue to refine your mission until it is simple to understand and remember, resonates with you, and can inspire you daily.

### ENLIST OTHERS TO HELP YOU ACCOMPLISH YOUR MISSION

Enlist others to help you accomplish your mission by sharing your mission/vision with them. Lief suggests that doing meaningful work ("the synergy of one's strengths, passions, and values") that is aligned with the values of your institution, is critical to professional fulfillment of academic physicians.<sup>12</sup> A national survey of faculty at US academic health centers reported that the highest predictors of faculty vitality were positive professional relationships and feeling included in the organization, followed by feeling that the faculty member's personal values were aligned with their institution's values.<sup>20</sup> Seek out mentors.<sup>21</sup> Mentors can help you reflect on your mission and offer insight into how well your mission is aligned with the values of your institution and department, how well your current activities align with your mission, and help you strategize how to achieve your goals. Share your vision/mission with your Division Chief, Department Chair, or Dean, and explicitly state how your personal vision/mission intersects with your institutional vision/mission to leverage resources to accomplish shared visions/missions.<sup>1</sup>

### USING YOUR MISSION STATEMENT IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

When you have developed your personal mission statement, you will likely find many opportunities to use it to advance your development as an educator. First, it can help guide you as you consider new opportunities. Does serving on a new committee align with your mission? If not, should you decline? That said, some opportunities that do not currently align with your mission might be of great interest and might allow you to explore new areas, which would then lead to a broadening of your mission or allow you to strengthen and build your network of colleagues who will help you accomplish your mission.

Second, you should revisit your mission statement as you set your annual goals, and when you are pursuing promotion. Sharing your mission with your Division Chief, Department Chair, Dean, and/or mentors can help keep your professional work aligned with what is most important to you and your career. In addition, reviewing your mission statement should also inspire you and remind you about why you are passionate about your career. By following this simple framework, you can create a personal mission statement that will allow you to be more focused in your work, more inspired in your career, and successfully achieve your goals.

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