

IS DIFFERENTIATION **BULLSH!T?**

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haley
MARKETING

OK, DON'T TAKE AWAY MY LICENSE TO BE A MARKETER.

I realize this headline is sacrilegious.
And provocative.

After all, Marketing 101 is about defining your USP.
Your key differentiators. Your unique value to the client.

In fact, in the past month, I read two marketing books (*The One-Page Marketing Plan* by Alan Dib and Dan Kennedy's *No BS Guide to Direct Response Social Media*). Both very clearly told readers that the key to success is to define your differentiation.

But I've been consulting with companies in the staffing industry for more than 25 years. And I've met some really successful entrepreneurs and staffing executives.

In all that time, I have yet to see one truly compelling USP.
**Could it be possible that there is NO unique differentiation in staffing?*

If you ask most staffing executives what makes their company unique, the most common responses you will hear are:

- **Our service makes us different!**
- **It's our people.**
- **Our industry knowledge makes us unique.**
- **We have a combined 7,256 years of experience.**
(I may be exaggerating on the number!)
- **We're a full-service staffing firm.**
- **We're a specialized staffing firm.**
- **It's the quality of the talent we deliver.**
- **And more recently, our technology and how we provide a superior customer experience!**

Now, read this list again.

When a client or prospect asks you what makes you different than your competitors, do you say any of these things?





Come on. Be honest.

If you do, don't feel bad. In a service industry like staffing, the most common way people try to differentiate is based on the quality of their service.

But the problem with differentiating on service, or quality, is that people have to experience your service to see the difference.

Even if your service IS better, is it so much better the client (or candidate) can perceive it as significantly better than their current vendors (who are also trying to differentiate based on service...and probably provide pretty good service)?

SO DAVID, ARE YOU TELLING US THERE IS NO WAY TO DIFFERENTIATE A STAFFING COMPANY?

No, I am not.

And here is where I get my license to market back.

In any highly commoditized industry, differentiation is unlikely to come from what you do (the service processes most companies use are exceptionally similar).

Your real differentiation comes from who you are:



Your mission



Your vision



Your core values

And how you live these things.

Your company's mission, vision, and values are (or should be) the most foundational aspects of your business. And if they are well-integrated into your sales, recruiting, and delivery processes, they can...and will... differentiate your company.

Now, some of you reading this may doubt me.



You may say, "mission, vision, and values are Business 101, not differentiation."

And you'd be right. They are Business 101. And for most companies, they do not create differentiation, which is why staffing is so commoditized.

But let me challenge your thinking.

Does your company have a clearly defined mission, vision, and core values? And if you do, are these foundational beliefs lived by every branch office, every salesperson, and every recruiter, every day?

In my experience, staffing companies fail to differentiate because they fail to develop a solid definition of who they are and what they stand for.

**OK, this is not 100% true. I have actually seen a handful of companies with truly differentiated staffing services. But for more than 99% of the companies I have helped, there was no unique differentiation.*

CREATING DIFFERENTIATION BASED ON WHO YOU ARE.

At Haley Marketing, we follow a management system called EOS (Entrepreneurial Operating System). In EOS and other systems like Scaling Up and Making BIG Happen, one of the first things you do is define your company's mission, vision, and core values.

So, what are mission, vision, and values...or maybe more accurately, what's the difference among these three things?

MISSION: **YOUR REASON FOR EXISTING.**

A mission statement defines what you do, why you do it, and who you do it for.

It is your quest for the Holy Grail...a big challenge you intend to conquer or a problem you will become the best in the world at solving. If you are a fan of Simon Sinek, your mission defines your "what" and "why."

To define your mission, ask yourself:

- **Why was your company founded?**
- **What major problem are you trying to solve?**
- **What do you strive to be the best in the world at doing?**
- **And for whom do you do it?**



A really good mission is bold. It's inspiring. And it addresses an issue that is not being resolved by others in your industry.

It's also easy to remember – ideally, a single sentence of 10 words or less.

Here are a few examples:



Spread ideas.
TED



To connect the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful.
LINKEDIN



To accelerate the world's transition to sustainable energy.
TESLA



To be Earth's most customer-centric company, where customers can find and discover anything they might want to buy online, and endeavors to offer its customers the lowest possible prices.
AMAZON



At Haley Marketing, our mission is to make WORLD-CLASS marketing EASY and AFFORDABLE for the staffing industry.

SO, WHAT IS YOUR MISSION?

What is your quest?

What problem are you solving for employers and job seekers?

How are you improving humanity with your services? (Are you starting to see how the right mission could lead to real differentiation?)

WHY DOES A MISSION DIFFERENTIATE YOUR COMPANY?

- **It defines your ideal client.**
- **It defines the specific value you intend to deliver.**
- **It's a challenge that can never be fully accomplished – a quest that provides clear direction for your people, products, and services.**
- **Every day that you live your mission a little better becomes a day that you improve service to your ideal customers.**
- **It's easy for everyone in your company to understand and see how their work impacts your mission in every client and candidate experience you deliver.**

For staffing companies, your mission may be related to serving clients, candidates, or both audiences. It may be about eliminating the problems associated with hiring, helping people live better lives, or improving how an industry works.

Need a little inspiration?

Here's an example I really love from one of our clients:



Our mission is to improve the careers—and lives—of the healthcare professionals we place.

I love this. It's clear. Bold. Concise. It tells everyone in their organization why they exist, who they serve, and what they are trying to accomplish.

Now this company came to us doubting their mission. They were concerned that it did not address the client. My response was, "Stop worrying!" In your specialty, focusing on serving the candidate is the right thing to do. And your mission is a lot broader than just staffing, which enables you to create a real difference in your approach to serving talent.

One last comment on mission statements:

DO NOT try to be all things to all people!

A well-defined mission is focused. It defines your positioning. It identifies your target market. And the more focused you are in your definition of your market and value, the easier it becomes to create real differentiation in your services.



HOW ABOUT VISION?

I find that most business owners struggle to understand the difference between mission and vision.

Let me provide a clear definition.

While your *mission* defines what you do and why you do it, your *vision* defines where you are going. It is a clear picture of the future state of your organization.

While a mission may be an aspirational quest that can never be fully realized, a vision is a well-defined target destination. One you believe so firmly in that in your mind, it has already happened.

Too often, and this happens in EOS, vision is nothing more than a financial goal. We'll become a \$50 million staffing company within five years.

While having a BHAG (big, hairy, audacious goal) is great – it provides a scorecard for your vision – it's not very inspiring. I mean, what employee gets excited about going to work for you because you're going to be a \$50 million company. (Even owners don't get that motivated by goals that are purely financial.)

YOU NEED A VIVID VISION.

A few months ago, I re-read a book by Cameron Herold called *Vivid Vision*. When it comes to driving business growth, Cameron is a rock star. And then some. You can check him out here: <https://cameronherold.com/>

In the book, Cameron advocates for creating a three-year vivid vision. Not 10 years. Not 5 years. 3. Period.

Why three years?

It's far enough out into the future that you can set and realize significant goals.



It's not so far out that you can't realistically envision what the future will look like. Beyond three years, changes in your industry, technology, and the economy are impossible to predict.

In the world of a vivid vision, you don't just define a financial target; you close your eyes and paint a picture of the future. You define, as vividly as you can, where you will be three years from today. This might include:

- How big your company will become – in revenue, geographic scope, number of offices, number of employees, etc.
- The services you will offer.
- Where you will be located – your company, your clients, your candidates.
- The types of clients you will serve and the unique value you will provide (this ties back to your mission).
- How your company will be structured.
- What new technologies will you be using, and how will you create or acquire them?
- Your company culture and what life will be like for your employees.
- The path you will follow to achieve your growth.
- The impact you will make in your industry and/or your local community.

To figure all of this out, Cameron suggests that you need to get away from your business. Go to a place that inspires you. Get off technology. And just think.

Imagine your future.

Better yet, project yourself three years into the future and look back at your past.

- **What did you achieve?**
- **What changed in your company? Your industry?**
- **How did you get from where you were three years ago to where you are today?**

If you have a larger company, consider a leadership retreat to brainstorm and consider possibilities. If you have a smaller company, the CEO needs to get away for quiet time to reflect and ponder the future.

Once your vivid vision is defined, you need to make it public.

1. *Start with your leadership team to get their feedback.*
2. *Then roll it out to your employees.*
3. *And finally, share it with your clients and suppliers.*

A vivid vision creates excitement. It attracts talent, interests investors, and gets clients excited to be part of your journey.

A well-defined vivid vision becomes a roadmap for your organization for the next three years. It clearly defines the next leg of your journey to realizing your company mission.

And if you doubt the value of this process, read Cameron's books. Or listen to his podcast. He has created not one. Not two. But three companies with more than \$100 million in revenue using this process.

SO HOW DOES THIS TIE TO YOUR DIFFERENTIATION?

Your mission is the dream.

Your vision is the plan to get there.

Put together, these two things uniquely define your company, your value, whom you serve, and how you operate. This combination can create an irresistible message for recruiting and a compelling rationale for employers to work with your company.

FINALLY, LET'S DISCUSS CORE VALUES.

Core values are the beliefs you live by. They are the proverbial “lines in the sand” that the people in your organization will not cross. They define your standards of performance and methods of operation.

Over the past 25 years, I've seen countless companies state that their core values are things like:

HONESTY. INTEGRITY. HARD WORK.

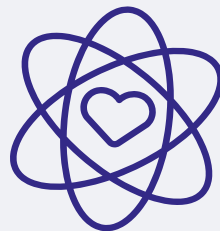
Meh. These don't differentiate. These are vanilla, motherhood and apple pie values that any company might adopt (and who would work with a company that did not embody these values???)

Certified EOS Implementer [Derek Pittak](#) reminds us that when companies discover their core values, they must avoid what Patrick Lencioni describes as accidental, aspirational, or permission to play values in his values traps diagram. These examples above highlight permission to play and are inherent to a good fit for your business. Think of it this way – *of course* you want to (and frankly should) hire honest people who do the right thing and are hardworking.

Strong core values define who you are. And how you operate. Derek also states that he has seen some of his clients take issue solving to an advanced level, and while working to identify the root cause, they ask each other, “where is there a conflict or weakness in our core values” as it relates to a particular issue. Now, that's living your values into how you operate your business!

Personally, I believe that core values should be written as an easy-to-remember word or phrase supported by a one-sentence description with examples to add clarity for your team.

Core values must be clear. Memorable. And fully integrated into your operations so they become the foundation of your culture. They must be a standard for hiring – a benchmark for performance reviews and things that are consistently celebrated in a very public way.



AT HALEY MARKETING, WE HAVE SIX CORE VALUES WE STRIVE TO LIVE BY:



Deliver a WOW.



Provide SHARE-WORTHY service.



Good isn't good enough.



Be the best in the world at what we do.



The Rule of Threes.



Work hard. Love what you do.

Each of these values has a short description, and we provide examples of what they mean in the culture deck that we provide to all new team members. We celebrate core value wins in our company Slack channels. And we review people against the values every quarter in our 5-5-5 meetings (part of the EOS process).

I share this with you not to brag about what we do, but to illustrate that core values can be a key component in defining how your people perform each and every day.

When you hire to core values, manage to core values, and recognize and reward core values, they will have a huge impact on how your service experience is perceived by your clients and candidates.

And that is ultimately *how service CAN become a differentiator!*

DIFFERENTIATION IS NOT BULLSHIT!

Nope. In staffing, differentiation comes down to who you are.

Your service process can be copied.

Your competitors can purchase the same technology.

Your sales and recruiting methods will likely be similar.

But what makes you truly unique is your purpose for being (*mission*), your path for getting there (*vision*), and how you show up every day (*core values*).

In a commoditized industry like staffing, where differentiation is hard to achieve, your mission, vision, and values can create a truly unique selling proposition!

LOOKING FOR HELP CREATING YOUR MISSION, VISION & VALUES?

Download our Strategic Vision Workbook. It provides a step-by-step process you can follow for creating your differentiation...and your marketing strategy.

» haleymarketing.com/strategicvision



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