

Knock, Knock: Purpose Calling



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This Friday, I'll accompany my son as he roams our neighborhood dressed as a caveman. It won't be NYC's famed "Fashion Week," but I'm looking forward to seeing what the "in" costumes look like this year. Like many kids, my son ventures out on Halloween with a clear purpose: to score as many sugary treats as possible before either his Friday night curfew, or my feet hurt so bad that I "cave in" and agree to buy him the video game of his choice so we can just go home.

Purpose is a familiar concept to the professional trick or treat crowd. Few, if any of the little monsters heading out this Friday are hoping to win the neighborhood costume party. The princesses and vampires alike have a simple and shared mission: to fill their treat bags. Public entities are born out of purpose: every organization's origin includes a grand idea and a purposeful plan to change what is into what could be. Yet over time, purpose sometimes gets lost in the hubbub of compliance obligations, the fear of legal liability, and the tedium of bureaucracy and funding cycles.

In his article titled, "[Generation Flux: Find Your Mission](#)," featured in the November 2014 issue of *Fast Company*, Robert Safian shines a spotlight on fluxers—leaders the author describes as "...people best positioned to thrive in today's era of high-velocity change." Wouldn't you agree that the public sector needs, and our missions deserve, leaders who are inspired by the rapidly changing world around them?

Safian's interviews yield a tempting array of leadership insights and treats that will the proverbial goodie bags of entity leaders who have forgotten the sweet reward of mission success.

Make Purpose the Top Ingredient in Your Recipe

Consider the following tips to get to the sweet treat of success that your mission deserves.

- **Put Mission Front and Center** — Don't hide your core purpose and mission behind your shiny new products and services. Remind everyone, from the newest employee to the long-standing client or partner agency, WHY you exist. At Google Creative Lab, the company's Executive Creative Director, Robert Wong came up with four new P's to replace the worn out P's you know from Marketing 101 (Product, Place, Price, and Promotion). Wong's four P's are: Purpose, People, Products, and Process. Wong's advice is to start with purpose, and make sure it's the right one, and then focus on people. According to Wong, products and services and processes will naturally fall into place when everything you do is driven by a core purpose and your sincere commitment to the people you lead.

- **Know What's Important** — Sallie Krawcheck, who leads Ellevest Network, is very picky when it comes to tricks and treats. She surveys her members weekly in order to truly know and understand their preferences. Ellevest Network's membership of professional business women make career choices based principally on meaning and purpose, not earnings potential. Krawcheck believes deeply in the value of diverse perspectives, and also that greater gender diversity will improve success in the financial services sector. And she's ready to put her money where her mouth is, literally: she recently launched an investment fund that will "focus on women-friendly, women-led companies and target female investors."
- **Learn to Filter** — Shauna Mei leads the luxury e-tail company Ahalife, where she helps luxury artisans and designers develop sustainable businesses. When employees suggested Ahalife try lowering prices to sell to a larger audience, Mei wisely resisted. Her philosophy of filtering and staying on track has helped the company stand out.

Public entity missions need and deserve leaders who aren't afraid of the complexity of today's world. The most successful sector leaders get the equivalent of a sugar high when they ponder the dynamism in their respective subsector, whether it's social services, education, amateur sports, or cultural arts. By getting comfortable and even happy with a world in flux, an entity leader is in the best position to make purpose more than a catchphrase or tagline on the back of a business card. When purpose drives everything else, the sky is indeed the limit.

Kay Nakamura was the Director of Client Solutions at the Nonprofit Risk Management Center.