



## ***Why Mission Statements Matter for Leaders***

By Virginia Swain, Founder and Director, Institute for Global Leadership (IGL) [www.global-leader.org](http://www.global-leader.org)

“Because I have a certainty of what I am being led to do with my life, I understand now how I can make a difference in the world.”  
From the Introduction: *A Mantle of Roses: A Woman's Journey Home to Peace* (Xlibris 2004) by Virginia Swain

Thomas Banyaca, the Hopi Elder delivered the Hopi Prophecy in the UN General Assembly in 1992: “We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. You have been telling people that is the eleventh hour. Now you must go back and tell the people that this is the hour. “Don’t go outside yourself for the leader.” (see [www.restoringfaithinhumanity.org](http://www.restoringfaithinhumanity.org))

*Writing a Personal Mission Statement*, a customized, individualized process and framework, is the foundation first step to “not go outside yourself for the leader” and clarify personal life purpose and mission. A toolbox, perspectives and personal, interpersonal, systemic and global competencies are taught to build on the leader’s mission. Its purpose is to:

- Recognize your core gifts and talents
- Confirm your special calling and integrity
- Learn to access your deepest hopes and visions
- Being proactive rather than reactive to challenges
- Take responsibility for your life by trusting your Mission.

People with mission statements step off the treadmill by building first personal time in their daily lives. They learn to listen within more effectively, reflect on their roles and the latest practices to learn new competencies. They are practical idealists who are able to withstand the daily pressures of a challenging work world by being proactive rather than reactive.

A well thought-out mission statement is protection, in a sense, against obstacles because of the confidence and strength that comes from owning and trusting a strong sense of purpose. The process helps students focus on “what they want to be (character) and to do (contribution and achievements) and on the values and principles upon which being and doing are based” or a personal constitution as Stephen Covey states in ***The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People***.

Covey writes, “Mission is ‘a personal constitution, the basis for making major, life-directing decisions, the basis for making daily decisions in the midst of the circumstances and emotions that affect our lives. It empowers individuals with the same timeless strength in the midst of change. People can’t live with change is there’s not a changeless core inside them... With a mission statement, we can flow with changes.”

In my consulting experience, people are hungry for authentic leadership, to have meaning and purpose in their lives. Besides having the confidence and trust in oneself and one’s abilities, a

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mission statement process gives a seasoned or emerging leader a foundation upon which to be successful in work and life, to find one's passion and personal power. Power is being re-defined.

Personal power is exemplified by a sense of inner integrity, clarity, intention, and confidence. Power is not defined as "power over" someone else. In mission driven leadership, the power that comes from knowing and trusting innate gifts and strengths is very powerful helping them "hold true to themselves" in a world of social and economic instability and change, a mission statement will help people withstand personal obstacles because they have a sense of what is solid, enduring and changeless about them.

Going within to find the leader requires, as educator Parker Palmer says "we who lead find the courage to take an inner journey toward both our shadows and our light – a journey that, faithfully pursued, will take us beyond ourselves to become healers of a wounded world. A new leadership is needed for new times, but it will not come from finding new and wiler ways to manipulate the external world."

**Webster's Dictionary's** definition is "a mission is a continuing task or responsibility that one is destined or fitted to do or specially called upon to undertake." The major synonyms listed in Webster are "calling" and "vocation".

Richard Bolles, in his bestseller, *What Color is Your Parachute?* writes that mission is not "a problem to be solved in a day and a night. It is a learning process which has steps to it. Each step has to be mastered in turn before the next can be approached. An important step, he writes, is to 'exercise the talent which you particularly have, your greatest gift, in which you most delight', in the place that appeals to you the most and for those purposes which most needs to have done in the world."

- View Institute for Global Leadership opinion piece on organizational mission: <http://www.global-leader.org/WhyMissionStatements.html>.
- *Reconciliation as Policy: A Capacity-Building Proposal for Renewing Leadership and Development*, Virginia Swain and Sarah Sayeed, for Round Table 3 of the 2005 Workshop on Humiliation and Violent Conflict, Columbia University, New York, December 15-16, 2005  
*A Leadership and Practice to Reconcile Challenges in a Post-September 11th World*, Virginia Swain and Sarah Sayeed prepared for the 2006 Workshop on Humiliation and Violent Conflict, Columbia University, New York, December 14-15, 2006.
- *Reconciliation Leadership Training Leaders for Sustainable Development Presenters*: Virginia Swain, M.A., Sam Onapa, Anna Sandidge, MSW Sarah Sayeed, Ph.D. The UN Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action [undp.untteamworks.org/node/403366](http://undp.untteamworks.org/node/403366)
- "Finding Peace Through Inner Strength: Worcester writer helps others chart course in turbulent times," Worcester Telegram, September 1, 2006 <http://www.telegram.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060901/NEWS/609010348/1102>
- For perspectives and training: [http://global-leader.org/gl\\_leadership\\_splash.html](http://global-leader.org/gl_leadership_splash.html).
- More media about the ripple effect of Leadership [http://www.centerglobalcommunitylaw.org/wl\\_media.html](http://www.centerglobalcommunitylaw.org/wl_media.html)
- Watch video of Hopi Elder Thomas Banyanca's speech at the UN in 1992 <https://vimeo.com/20313287>

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