

**By Bruce Jones, Senior Programming Director, Disney Institute**

### **What is the difference between an organization's mission and its common purpose?**

People frequently ask the Disney Institute team this important question. To answer it, we must define "mission." Most organizations think of a mission as a way to align everyone in the organization to the same focus. It describes what business the company is in now and what business it plans to be in in the future. The common purpose goes beyond the mission, acting as the unifying principle that drives everything the organization does. To understand what that means at Disney Institute, I'll provide some historical context.

In a 1960 speech to Hewlett-Packard's training group, company co-founder David Packard said,

I want to discuss why a company exists in the first place. In other words, why are we here? I think many people assume, wrongly, that a company exists simply to make money. While this is an important result of a company's existence, we have to go deeper and find the real reasons for our being. . . . Purpose (which should last at least 100 years) should not be confused with specific goals or business strategies (which should change many times in 100 years). Whereas you might achieve a goal or complete a strategy, you cannot fulfill a purpose; it's like a guiding star on the horizon—forever pursued but never reached. Yet although purpose itself does not change, it does inspire change. The very fact that purpose can never be fully realized means that an organization can never stop stimulating change and progress.

Now, you're probably wondering, "What is the connection among David Packard, Walt Disney, and the concept of purpose?" Well, HP's first product was a sound oscillator—which it sold to Walt Disney Studios to use on the *Fantasia* soundtrack.

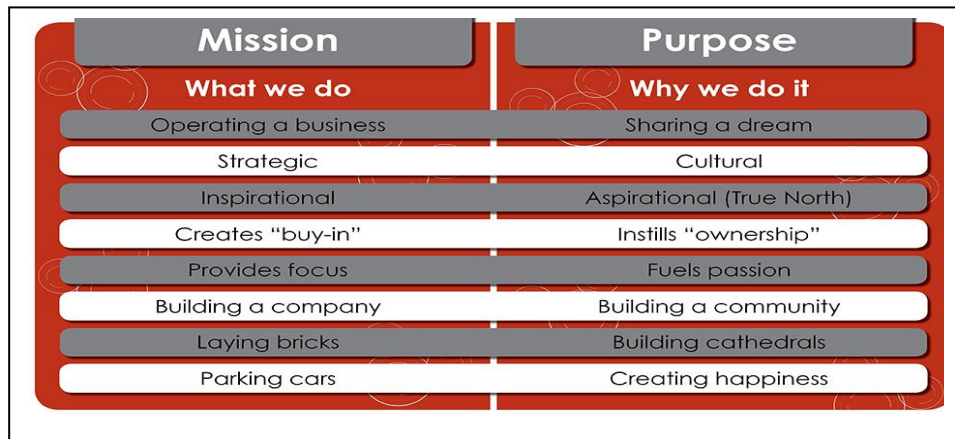
Packard delivered this speech in 1960, so he may have been influenced by people like Van Arsdale France, who founded the University of Disneyland in 1955. Van was tasked with creating a training program for those who would bring Walt's dream of Disneyland to life. As he prepared to pitch what would become the purpose of Disneyland to Walt and Roy Disney, Van said, "My goal, as I saw it, was to get everyone we hired to share in an intangible dream, and not just working for a paycheck." Van recounted the experience:

And here were top executives, all of them right there, and I had to get up and say "And now our theme: the purpose of Disneyland is to create happiness for others." And you see, the beautiful thing about saying, "We're going to create happiness" was then I could say, "Look, you may park cars, clean up the place, sweep the place, work graveyard and everything else, but whatever you do is contributing to creating happiness for others."

For me, that has been the key lesson: the host of labels out there that describe organizational direction can seem overwhelming or confusing, and in too many organizations very few people can recite or even recall them without referring to their notes.

Van's particular genius was to create a single, unifying principle that connects every Cast Member with our Guests' emotional aspirations. He explained that the common purpose is the *raison d'être*—the reason for being—and it drives the extraordinary effort, creativity, teamwork, and Guest focus for which Disney is known.

### **What are the specific differences between mission and purpose?**



Why is the *raison d'être* concept so important for organizations today? I think that Simon Sinek, author of *Start With Why*, explains it best:

Studies show that over 80 percent of Americans do not have their dream job. If more knew how to build organizations that inspire, we could live in a world in which that statistic was the reverse—a world in which over 80 percent of people loved their jobs. People who love going to work are more productive and more creative. They go home happier and have happier families. They treat their colleagues and clients and customers better. Inspired employees make for stronger companies and stronger economies.

Now, that sounds like a purpose we all can believe in.

How does your organization define its purpose?

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As the trusted, authoritative voice on the Disney approach to customer experience, Disney Institute uses business insights and time-tested examples from Disney parks and resorts worldwide to help organizations develop the customer experience culture they are capable of delivering. For nearly three decades, Disney Institute has helped professionals discover ways to positively impact their organizations and the customers they serve through immersion in leadership, service, and employee engagement. Unique to Disney Institute is the opportunity to go behind the scenes in a "living laboratory" to observe firsthand how Disney methodologies are operationalized and how they can be adapted and applied to any work environment.

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