

A Personal Mission Statement

So if it is so important to have an end in mind, how do you do it? The best way I have found is to write a personal mission statement. A personal mission statement is like a personal credo or motto that states what your life is about. It is like the blueprint to your life. Countries have constitutions, which function just like a mission statement. And most companies, like Microsoft and Coca-Cola, have mission statements. But I think they work best with people.

So why not write your own personal mission statement? Many teens have. As you'll see, they come in all types and varieties. Some are long and some are short. Some are poems and some are songs. Some teens have used their favorite quote as a mission statement. Others have used a picture or a photograph.

Let me share a few teenage mission statements with you. This first one was contributed by a teen named Beth Haire:



*First and foremost, I will remain faithful
always to my God.*

I will not underestimate the power of family unity.

*I will not neglect a true friend, but I will set aside
time for myself as well.*

*I will cross my bridges as I come to them
(divide and conquer).*

*I will begin all challenges with optimism,
rather than doubt.*

*I will always maintain a positive self-image
and high self-esteem, knowing that all my intentions begin
with self-evaluation.*



Mary Beth Sylvester took her mission statement from the Sinéad O'Connor song "Emperor's New Clothes." It reads:

*I will live by my own policies.
I will sleep with a clear conscience.
I will sleep in peace.*

Steven Strong shared this one:

Religion
Education
Succeeding
Productive
Exercise
Caring
Truthful

I met a teen named Adam Sosne from North Carolina who was familiar with the 7 Habits and was "on fire" about his future plans. Not surprisingly, he had a mission statement, which he volunteered:

MISSION STATEMENT

- Have confidence in yourself and everyone else around you.
- Be kind, courteous, and respectful to all people.
- Set reachable goals.
- Never lose sight of these goals.
- Never take the simple things in life for granted.
- Appreciate other people's differences and see their differences as a great advantage.
- Ask questions.
- Strive each day to reach interdependence.
- Remember that before you can change someone else, you must first change yourself.
- Speak with your actions, not with your words.
- Make the time to help those less fortunate than yourself or those who are having a bad day.
- Read the 7 Habits every day.

Read this mission statement every day.

So what can writing a mission statement do for you? Tons. The most important thing it will do is open your eyes to what's really important to you and help you make decisions accordingly. A twelfth grader shared how writing a mission statement made such a difference in her life:

During my junior year I couldn't concentrate on anything because I had a boyfriend. I wanted to do everything for him to make him happy, and then, naturally, the subject of sex came up—and I wasn't at all prepared for it, and it became a nagging constant thing on my mind. I felt like I wasn't ready and that I didn't want to have sex—but everyone else kept saying, "Just do it."

Then I participated in a character development class at school where they taught me to write a mission statement. I started to write and kept on writing and writing, and kept adding things to it. It gave me direction and a focus and I felt like I had a plan and a reason for doing what I was doing. It really helped me to stick to my standards and not do something I wasn't ready for.

A personal mission statement is like a tree with deep roots. It is stable and isn't going anywhere, but it is also alive and continually growing.

You need a tree with deep roots to help you survive all of the storms of life that beat you up. As you've probably noticed already, life is anything but stable. Think about it. People are fickle. Your boyfriend loves you one minute and then dumps you the next. You're someone's best friend one day, and they're talking behind your back the next.

Think about all of the events you can't control. You have to move. You lose your job. The country is at war. Your parents are getting divorced.

Fads come and go. Sweaters are popular one year and on their way out the next. Rap music is the thing. Rap music stinks.

While everything about you changes, a personal mission statement can be your deep-rooted tree that never moves. You can deal with change if you have an immovable trunk to hang on to.



• UNCOVERING YOUR TALENTS

An important part of developing a personal mission statement is discovering what you're good at. One thing I know for sure is that everyone has a talent, a gift, something they do well. Some talents, like having the singing voice of an angel, attract a lot of attention. But there are many other talents, maybe not as attention grabbing but every bit as important if not more—things like being skilled at listening, mak-



ing people laugh, giving, forgiving, drawing, or just being nice. Another truth is that we all blossom at different times. So if you're a late bloomer, relax. It may take you a while to uncover your talents.

After carving a beautiful sculpture, Michelangelo was asked how he was able to do it. He replied by saying that the sculpture was already in the block of granite from the very beginning; he just had to chisel off everything else around it.

Likewise, Victor Frankl, a famous Jewish-Austrian psychiatrist who survived the death camps of Nazi Germany, taught that we don't *invent* our talents in life but rather we *detect* them. In other words, you are already born with your talents, you just need to uncover them.

I'll never forget my experience with finding a talent I never thought I had. To fulfill Mr. Williams' creative writing assignment for freshman English, I excitedly turned in my first high school paper, entitled "The Old Man and the Fish." It was the same story my father had often told me at night while I was growing up. I just assumed he had made it up. He didn't bother telling me he had stolen the plot directly from Ernest Hemingway's award-winning novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. I was shocked when my paper was returned with the remarks, "Sounds a bit trite. Like Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*." "Who's this guy Hemingway?" I thought. "And how come he copied my dad?" That was my poor start to four years of rather boring high school English classes, which were about as exciting to me as a clump of dirt.

It wasn't until college, when I took a short story class from a remarkable professor, that I began to detect my passion for writing. If you can believe it, I even majored in English. Mr. Williams would have died.

The Great Discovery

The Great Discovery* is a fun activity designed to help you get in touch with your deeper self as you prepare to write a mission statement. As you walk through it, answer the questions honestly. You can write your answers in the book, if you'd like. If you don't feel like writing your answers down, just think them through. When you're finished, I think you'll have a much better idea of what inspires you, what you enjoy doing, whom you admire, and where you want to take your life.

*For additional worksheets of The Great Discovery, please call 1-800-952-6839.

