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In Her Own Words: Make a (Mission) Statement

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Make a (Mission) Statement

By Diana Macri

Honor is like a rugged island without a shore; once you have left it, you cannot return.
—Nicolas Boileau

In October of last year, the United States heard of the academic scandal at the University of North Carolina where, over the course of 18 years, students received credit for African-American studies courses without having to show up for class, complete assignments or take any tests. What makes this incident particularly hard to swallow is the person at the center of the controversy, Professor Jan Boxill.



Diana Macri

Boxill was a tenured philosophy professor and former director of the Parr Center for Ethics at UNC. An irrefutable and staggering (in their number if not in content) string of emails confirmed her complicity in helping athletes remain academically eligible to play sports.

Ask the average person what ethics is and they'll likely refer to it as a set of moral principles or values. But what are these moral principles and who gets to decide which ones are more important than others?

Even among those who believe they know ethics, there is not total agreement on the meaning of the terms that are used. Ethics are standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do; principles such as veracity, courage, integrity, forthrightness, consistency, creativity, humility, altruism, quality, accountability, excellence, compassion, innovation, social justice, wisdom, kindness, trust, balance and fairness. This is in relation to themselves, to each other, to other species and to the environment.

The challenge for most lies not in finding consensus on the principles that are most important, but in remaining loyal to them. By reminding us of what we value most, personal mission statements help us to resolve the various ethical dilemmas we face every day.

Where ethics comes from

Our most fundamental attitudes about what is right or wrong are taught to us by our parents. Religion, life events and education all play a part in those attitudes as well. These factors shape not only our values but our ability to adhere to those values when we are tested.

When I teach professional ethics, one of my major goals is to assist students in reaching an awareness of their own moral perspective. Most of my students are unaware of what their moral perspective is.

This is not due to their youth; most adults are not aware of what exactly is guiding their decisions, and that alone undermines their ability to behave ethically. I guide them in creating a personal mission statement to help them understand their moral perspective.

Creating a personal mission statement

Most people have heard of mission statements as they relate to organizations.

Companies have corporate mission statements designed to provide direction and inspiration to the organization. A company's mission statement serves as a reminder of what the goals for the organization are. A mission statement explains the organization's reason for being and answers the question, "What is it that we want to do?"

A personal mission statement is a bit different from a company mission statement, but the fundamental principles are the same. Writing a personal mission statement offers one the opportunity to establish what's important and helps reinforce it when tested.

Stephen Covey in *First Things First: Understand Why So Often Our First Things Aren't First* (Fireside, 1994) refers to developing a mission statement as "connecting with your own unique purpose and the profound satisfaction that comes from fulfilling it." A personal mission statement helps a person identify their core values and beliefs. It's a synopsis of what you're all about and wish to be. It's your definition of success.

Crafting a personal mission statement will take some time, introspection and self-awareness. The first part of the process is to let go of the past and whatever failures and disappointments have occurred.

What we perceive as negative experiences, or failures, are actually the things that have taught us the most. We must accept our shortcomings in the past in order to behave better in the future.

To craft a strong statement, you must be honest with yourself about what it is that you are and what it is that you want to be. I tell my students to "dream big" when they are thinking of the core components of the statement. Ask yourself:

- What is the most important thing in my life?
- Who are the most important people in my life?
- What contributions do I want to make?
- What talents do I possess?
- What makes me happy?
- What core values are most important to me?

There are also Web-based sources that can help you craft your personal mission statement. The Franklin Covey link (<http://www.franklincovey.com/msb/>) directs you to answer a series of questions. Once you have answered all the questions, it will automatically condense your answers and allow you to save them and/or copy and paste. Use this as a template for your personal mission statement. Add and remove sections as you wish. Elaborate the sections you feel most strongly about.

It will take time

A personal mission statement is meant to be created once and it usually takes quite a while to complete. Most find it difficult to define their greatest aspirations and, consequently, the means by which to achieve them. But through honest

A personal mission statement is a synopsis of what you're all about and wish to be. It's your definition of success.

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For position qualifications & job description, visit
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Women on the Move,
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- **Cristal Thomas** becomes vice president for community health engagement at the University of Chicago School of Medicine IL as well as senior adviser to the vice president for civic engagement at the University of Chicago IL.
- **Carolyn Walters** becomes Ruth Lilly Dean of University Libraries at Indiana University. She has been serving as the executive director of the Office of Scholarly Publishing.
- **Rita Walters** moves from chief development officer for the Washington National Cathedral to vice president for advancement at the Maryland Institute College of Art—Baltimore.
- **Vickie Williams** becomes dean of the School of Management at the University of Alaska Southeast.
- **Dr. Charlene E. Wolf-Hall** moves from chair of the veterinary and microbiological sciences department to vice provost for academic affairs at North Dakota State University.

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introspection, as you carefully assert what you value most, you will create a set of rules to guide you.

As Covey states, “Fundamentally, your mission statement becomes your constitution, the solid expression of your vision and values. It becomes the criterion by which you measure everything else in your life.” It will become harder to stray from your core values once you have defined them this way.

Once you have completed the statement, keep it close by and refer to it regularly. If you are bold, display it in your office or webpage or include it in your portfolio. Such open expressions of individuality never go unnoticed or unappreciated. ▀

Diana Macri, RDH, BSDH, MS.Ed., AADH, is an assistant professor in the allied health department at Hostos Community College NY, where she teaches ethics and jurisprudence, among other courses. She is the editorial director for *RDH Graduate*, an online newsletter for dental hygiene students and recent graduates. She is a strong advocate for the profession and seeks to promote its expansion and visibility. Additionally, she advocates for the resolution of oral health disparities—most notably, through her work with the Hispanic Dental Association, where she serves as secretary of the New York chapter and as the only dental hygienist on the board of trustees. She practices and teaches in New York City, where she happily resides with her three sons.