

# Purposeful Work: Connecting Employees to their WHY

By Carol A. Poore, Ph.D., MBA

My consulting frequently focuses on helping an organization excel through determining social impact, or a “grand challenge” – the Big Why.

A purposeful “grand challenge” is a socially responsible goal to increase relevance, visibility, mission impact, profits, and contributes to life on earth. Companies that are known for a noble purpose offer more emotional engagement with both employees and customers leading to financial success.

For example, in 2014, [CVS Health](#) became the first national retail pharmacy chain to stop selling tobacco products in all stores because it conflicted with its purpose and grand challenge of helping people on their path to better health. Instead of financial loss, the company exceed prior revenue through new opportunities with alliance partners.

A critical next step, after clarifying a company’s vision and meaningful impact on customers and communities, is to then institutionalize a way to help employees make their own personal connections to the company’s purpose as contributors.

A compelling grand challenge should engage all employees and impact each major area of an organization. It should be inspirational and specific.

[Lisa McLeod](#) notes that an organization’s “noble purpose” should point to customers and should:

1. Be brief.
2. Describe the impact you have (and wish to have) on customers.
3. Provide a lens for decision-making.
4. Promote product and service innovation.
5. Translate into behaviors.

A company’s “why” also should become an integral part of its recruiting, hiring and onboarding.

Organizations can create conversation tools to help leaders and their employees *see themselves* in the grand challenge, to understand their personal “why” as well as be more personally connected to the social impact the company says it wants to make.

[OfficeVibe](#) notes instead of focusing exclusively on numbers and metrics, leaders can highlight the real change employees are making in customers’ lives. For example, Southwest Airlines features stories about employees going above and beyond each month in the *Southwest Spirit* magazine. The company also produces videos full of stories from real customers about great experiences.

These are substantial, long-term conversations about company purpose and individual purpose / mission. Tools to connect the two can be helpful. Check out this [helpful chart by Moving Worlds connecting organizational social impact with individual impact and purpose.](#)

