

Creating a Compelling Purpose in a Group that Meets Regularly

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In groups that meet regularly, overtime Purpose can feel mundane. People assume that ‘we meet because the meeting is on my calendar.’ Here's an idea often helpful when the energy in a group is flagging or attendance is falling off. It's a group action you can initiate from any position: group member, leader, or facilitator. For this discussion, you will probably want to set aside one to two hours—or up to a full day, depending on the degree of alignment within the group (sometimes the greater alignment, the less time needed). The goal of this exercise to revitalize the group by affirming commitment to the group's important Purpose—and to understand how it motivates or is compelling to team members. As such, it's a simple and very effective team building activity. Here are the steps to follow.

1. Explain the goal of the exercise.
2. Ask each person to write down his or her view of the group's Purpose. Then, moving from one person to the next, ask each to read his or her statement. Discourage any discussion until all have spoken.
3. Encourage group discussion by asking such questions as: *What observations or reactions do you have about our different versions of our group's Purpose? What was similar? What was different? Regardless of how the Purpose statements were expressed, are they in alignment with each other? If not, what questions do we need to talk about, so that we can be in alignment?* If there is a high degree of alignment, go on to step #5.
4. Once the alignment questions have been explored and addressed, ask: *How would we now state our Purpose?* Using a flip chart or white board, capture language that effectively states the consensus view of group members and the designated leader (if there is one).
5. Then, draw a 5-point continuum, along with this question: *On a scale of 1-5 (with 5 being high), how compelling is this Purpose statement to you? To what degree does it inspire you?* Then ask each person to mark the continuum, indicating his or her answer. Once this is done, ask group members to tell why they placed their marks where they did. Make sure you hear from everyone. Follow up questions can be similar to those suggested in step #3.
6. If the continuum indicates that the Purpose needs to be more compelling, shift the subject to the group's Impact by asking questions such as: *What difference do we want to make in the world? Two years from now, what will we be proud to hear others say about our work? What is the larger meaning of what we are really doing here together?*

7. When this discussion is complete, ask: *In light of this discussion, how do we want to reframe our Purpose statement?* Make changes as appropriate.
8. Return to step #5 above, to check the degree to which this new statement of Purpose is compelling.
9. And finally, *Given how we have reframed (or affirmed) our Purpose, what implications are there for how we go about doing our work? When we meet? Outside of our meetings? What changes should we make so that our experience working together matches the importance of what we are here to do?*
10. Reach agreement about those changes and follow through as planned.