

The Purpose Sheet

Why your business exists, what it refuses in order to stay that way, and the vision and mission that come out of both.

Every other sheet in this method asks what you do. This one asks why you do it, and then makes you prove the answer. Purpose is not a step in this method. It is the ground everything else stands on.

Most owners have never written this down. The ones who have usually wrote something that sounds good and changes nothing. A purpose that costs you nothing is decoration. So this sheet has two halves, and they have to agree with each other.

THE SHAPE OF THE ANSWER

WHY	Why you exist. The reason beyond making money. This is the hardest one to write, and it is the one that matters.
HOW	How you do it. The way you work that other places do not.
WHAT	What you sell. The products, the service, the room. Everyone can answer this one.

Simon Sinek calls this the Golden Circle. Most businesses start at What and never reach Why. Start at Why and work outward. Your What is the proof of your Why.

AN EXAMPLE

Maria runs a four table cafe in a neighborhood that is changing fast. Her What is easy: coffee, pastries, a counter. Her How took longer to find: everything baked before six in the morning, nothing frozen, regulars greeted by name before they order. Her Why took the longest, and it did not sound impressive at first. Her grandmother ran a panaderia in Cartagena, and the smell of bread at dawn is the only memory of her that never faded. Maria keeps the ovens running before sunrise not because it is efficient. It costs her sleep and a second staff shift she can barely afford. She keeps it because the alternative, a cafe that opens at eight like every other one on the block, is not the promise she is keeping. That is a Why. It explains a real cost. It is not a mission statement. It is a memory made into a business decision.

THE COMPLETION TEST

You are done with this page when you can answer one question without hedging: if a competitor undercut your price by twenty percent, would you still run the business this way? If the honest answer is no, keep writing. A Why that bends the moment it gets expensive was never a Why. It was a preference wearing a mission statement.

THE GROUND AND WHAT IT PRODUCES

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The Ground, and What It Produces

Write in Golden Circle order: Why, then How, then What. The order is the point.

THE GROUND

WHY Why does this business exist, beyond making money?

HOW How do you do it differently from anyone else in the category?

WHAT What do you actually sell?

WHAT IT PRODUCES

Purpose, vision and mission are not three separate questions. They are what your three answers above produce, once you have them right.

PURPOSE	The reason itself. What you wrote as your Why, restated as one sentence you could say out loud to a stranger.
VISION	What the neighborhood, the industry or the category looks like if your Why wins. Not your company in five years. The world your company is trying to build.
MISSION	What your business does, today, to move toward that vision. This is the only one of the three that changes as you grow.

THE WEIGHT

A purpose is only real if it would survive a bad quarter. Write one sentence: what would you refuse to do to hit a number, even if refusing it cost you the number?

THE PROOF

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The Proof

Michael Porter's test for a real strategy: a position is not defensible unless it costs something to hold.

Write five things this business will never do, sell or say. For each one, name what it costs you, and check whether it actually serves the Why you wrote on page two. If a refusal does not trace back to your Why, it is a preference, not a proof.

THE REFUSAL	WHAT IT COSTS	SERVES THE WHY?

THE CHECK

TEST ONE · THE COST TEST

Does at least one refusal above cost you real money or a real customer? If every refusal is free, rewrite it. A free refusal is a preference, and preferences do not build a moat.

TEST TWO · THE SURVIVOR TEST

If you disappeared tomorrow, would the purpose survive with someone else running this business, or does it only exist because you personally believe it? A purpose that only lives in your head is not yet a purpose. It is a feeling.