

Purpose Quick-Start

**Uncover your company's
purpose by defining why it
should be remembered.**

**WHY ARE
YOU IN
BUSINESS?**

Write Your Company's Obituary

Of all the tools I've used with clients throughout the years, this exercise is the one that gets the most mileage by far. Why write an obituary for your organization? By imagining the organization as dead, executives, who are usually consumed with the details, get permission to let go of the minutia. With day-to-day concerns out of the way leaders have room to think bigger.

Here's the overview: it is 25 years from now and the company has ceased to operate. It is your job to describe why the company will be remembered in three to five short paragraphs. When complete, the obituary should answer the questions: What were the company's greatest accomplishments, and how did it change the world?

We usually work with executives and vice presidents, but you can involve a diversity of roles depending on who needs to be brought into the process. Include those who know the company well (veterans), those who have a knack for seeing the future (visionaries), and those who might be challenging to get on board later if they are left out (blockers).

WHY YOU'RE DOING THIS

To answer the question "Why are we in business beyond making money?"

HOW YOU'LL DO IT

A half-day workshop.

WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE

8 to 12 colleagues including veterans, visionaries, and blockers.

WHERE IT SHOULD HAPPEN

A large room with lots of wall space and room to collaborate.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

A poster-sized sticky pad, lots of markers, dot stickers, a copy of the worksheet and a half-day of uninterrupted time.

HOW LONG YOU'LL NEED

3 hours.

Download this exercise to work on with your team at [greatmondays.com](https://www.greatmondays.com)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Split workshop participants into three to four teams. No team should have more than five members.
2. Instruct each team to work together to write the first draft of their obituary. They should end up with three to five short paragraphs that include only the most important details. *Hint: Bulleted lists don't work nearly as well as complete sentences. Don't let anyone go that route.*
Time: 30 to 45 minutes
3. Ask each team to make any final edits and then transpose their entire obituary by hand onto the large sticky pad. (Yes, they must write it out. And yes, they must put it up so everyone can see.)
Time: 30 minutes
4. Invite one person from each team to read back his or her obituary.
Time: 20 minutes
5. Once all teams have presented, pass out the dot stickers. Each person will place them next to the words and phrases he or she finds the most compelling or relevant. Each person gets six to eight dots and can vote on anything, including his or her own answer. You can even put multiple dots on one idea if it seems particularly important.
Time: 15 minutes
6. Once everyone has used all their stickers, ask one person to tally up the votes, and mark the words and phrases that were most popular.
Time: 10 minutes
7. As a group, discuss what you notice and what it might mean for the purpose of the organization. Talk about which got the most votes and why. Look for patterns. Are there any common themes? What stands out? What was expected or unexpected?
Time: 30 minutes

A good obituary avoids getting dragged down by reality, and instead leans in to the seemingly impossible.

{ obituary example }

Petcha will be missed.

Petcha.com, known the world over as the global brand that created local connections between people and their pets, closed today. The company was built on the premise that pet owners have known for years: take care of your pet and you take care of yourself. The site completely eradicated the need for shelters because every pet that needed to be cared for found an owner who needed that love as well.

The sudden rise in national well-being that occurred in the late 2020s was directly connected to Petcha's success. Petcha reversed the decline in health due to stress and anxiety that most of the working population suffered from. The company's prevalence inspired the creation of the National Wellness index so that other communities could track the benefits of pet ownership. Petcha.com increased Gross National Product *and* Gross National Happiness. It will be missed.

Write Your Company's Purpose Statement

Now that the group has surfaced some of the elements of the company's reason to exist, it's time to sharpen the thinking. Using the most important words or phrases from the obituary (which should still be up around the room) as a starting point, draft a purpose statement. It should be written in 25 words or less and start with the phrase "To <action verb>." (*See the list of Good Purpose Statements earlier in the chapter for guidance and inspiration.*)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Ask each participant to make three attempts at writing a purpose statement.
Time: 20 minutes
2. Have each person read to the group the one he or she considers the best. Request that someone transcribe each on a large sheet or whiteboard.
Time: 20 minutes
3. Discuss as a group what works about each, and choose the one that best captures your company's purpose. You might want to combine two if there are elements that work in both. Make any final edits and rewrite for the group to reflect on.
Time: 20 minutes

{ purpose statement example }

Petcha's Purpose

To help more people have better lives by becoming great pet owners.

WRITE THREE PURPOSE STATEMENTS, EACH 25 WORDS OR LESS.

1. To _____
<ACTION VERB>

2. To _____
<ACTION VERB>

3. To _____
<ACTION VERB>
