

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/articulating-your-why>

Kyle Forster, co-founder of Big Switch Networks, discusses the immense effort involved in refining a mission statement from its initial form to one that is neither too vague and lacks meaning, nor is too detailed and fails to resonate widely. Even though the most poignant leadership statements are concise, Forster says significant time and commitment are needed to get it right.



Transcript

I spent about a little over a year as the VP of Marketing for Big Switch and when I kind of first started it our self-described mission was something along the lines of, we build software-defined networking style operating systems for bare metal switch hardwares to power next generation.... and leaf-spine L2 L3 class switching fabrics.. That means a lot to people in our industry but it took us about 100 drafts to come up with something a little bit different, that something was we believe that the network advances that have been made by Google, Amazon, Facebook and Microsoft should be within reach of a much broader audience.. It was funny to see as we kind of converged on this, the external messaging is, that kind of is what it is, that part worked very, very well but the interesting thing to me was the internal alignment.. I got to tell you, people just seem more excited about coming to work.. So it takes a ton of drafts to find one of these leadership statements, that's not so high level and vague that it's meaningless.. There's like a food bank, like 10 blocks from my house, it says like, our mission is to feed the world's hungry, food bank near the park in San Francisco, like it's a little bit of a mismatch and then it's really hard to come up with something that's not so detailed that it doesn't really resonate, so getting the right level in there is something that takes drafts and if you find yourself in a leadership spot and you're trying to articulate your own why and you are trying to articulate your organization's why.. I urge you to have patience, take the time that it's going to require to do 100 drafts.. And the end result of all this work - it's probably very, very short...