

THE
SCIENCE OF STORY
BRAND IS A REFLECTION OF CULTURE

AAR Case Study in this new book about purpose



Company: AAR Corp.

Location: Wood Dale, Illinois

Business/Organization: Global provider of aviation services

Purpose: Doing it right to better connect the world

When the leadership of AAR Corp. decided they needed to articulate a corporate purpose and refreshed values, they acted with the speed and efficiency that is the company's hallmark.

First, they brought an agency on board to help in the task, and then they consulted with stakeholders across their entire business spectrum. But once the top business leaders themselves sat in a room to finally define the purpose and values, it took no more than two hours. Agreement happened so fast that initially that they brought in a few employees working nearby for a credibility sniff test to make sure they were not off base, as Kathleen Cantillon, Vice President of Strategic Communications, told us.

The new purpose: *doing it right to connect a better world*. It's a perfect summation of what AAR is all about. The aviation aftermarket services firm knows it has to get it right because it's responsible for the maintenance and safety of commercial and military aircraft across the globe. There's zero margin for error. A mistake could prove fatal. And, of course, the company and its team of more than 5,000 play a critical role in helping major airlines connecting people and businesses country to country.

While AAR can deliver some parts anywhere in the world within three hours—a time margin that's critical for cost-effective airline operations—the future is about more than parts and maintenance. It's about people.

AAR's road to articulating its purpose began when CEO David P. Storch succeeded his father-in-law, company founder Ira A. Eichner, as Chairman of the Board. At the time, AAR was

still using a mission statement and principles that were established in the late 1990s. When the company strategically re-positioned in 2015, AAR believed that to continue to grow globally and have a positive impact on the rapidly changing aviation industry, it needed stronger brand awareness of its capabilities within the B2B supply chain.

Its new goal was to become best in class with a high-performance culture. AAR leaders believed that employees needed to be fully engaged in their workplace by aspiring to the company's higher purpose and living its values. And it was up to leadership to ignite this culture by clearly communicating its purpose and living its values.

Listen to how the company puts "Doing it right" into a larger context: "Right is not always easy. Right is not always patient. Right can be brave, demanding, and even unique. So, it was when women won the right to vote, when FedEx introduced next-day delivery, or when Amazon reinvented the supply chain. Right is about setting a direction, believing in what you are doing, and doing it well."

"At AAR, we constantly search for the right thing to do for our customers, for our employees, for partners, and for society. We wake up in the morning knowing we have to deliver, and at the end of the day, believe we did our best, and are encouraged to return the next day and do even better. We do not rest on our earlier accomplishments."

Kathleen, whose 30-year career focused primarily on external communications, admits that her first experience of igniting a company's culture was a bit daunting, but she definitely did it right. Here's how:

Step One: Created compelling collateral materials to simultaneously convey the new vision to all teams around the world, including:

1. A values video on YouTube developed in conjunction with the outside firm that featured employee peers and not just leadership.
2. A PowerPoint presentation that showcased the purpose framework and was distributed for local playback to avoid technology screen share issues.
3. A flipbook for each employee outlining purpose and values for quick and convenient desk reference.
4. Giveaways promoting the new purpose.

Key managers in each location were trained on the new purpose and materials, and charged with customizing them for local consumption.

Step Two: Coordinated with top managers a couple of weeks before the launch and conducted breakout sessions to discuss how the new purpose and values framework would be relevant to each manager's workforce and how to communicate it in a way that would resonate with each team. The managers were trained and inspired to lead local sessions on Purpose launch day that were broken into two parts:

1. A global live telephone broadcast from the CEO (which was also recorded for those who couldn't attend in person due to time difference, etc.).
2. An on-site airing of the purpose/values video followed by an open forum for employees and their managers to discuss what this meant for them and their area of business.

Step Three: Kept momentum going. For reinforcement, the AAR employee media hub was updated with sections devoted to "Doing it right." An online course was pushed to all employees. Each week a story highlighting an office or employee living a value was shared

through AAR's intranet. Local managers also developed recognition tokens, which they gave to employees who were living the newfound Why, "Doing it right."

AAR even launched a #DoingItRight hashtag for use on social media. And performance appraisals began to include the new values as part of employee evaluation and goal setting. Additionally, knowing that the best ideas often come from the people doing the work, AAR provided financial incentives for ideas that generated revenue and saved costs. The new purpose and values have also found their way into AAR's hiring and training process, since this is the best time to assess if someone is a good match for the company culture.

How did the AAR workforce respond to the new purpose of, "Doing it right?" In a company-wide survey conducted a few months after launch, 63 percent said they felt inspired and 66 percent believed it would make AAR a better place to work: a high acceptance rate when you consider many workers' natural skepticism, especially longer-term employees.

How are they doing? They're doing it right!¹

For more information visit [Amazon](#).

¹ Kathleen Cantillon (Vice President of Strategic Communications at AAR Corp.) in discussion with the author, September 2016.