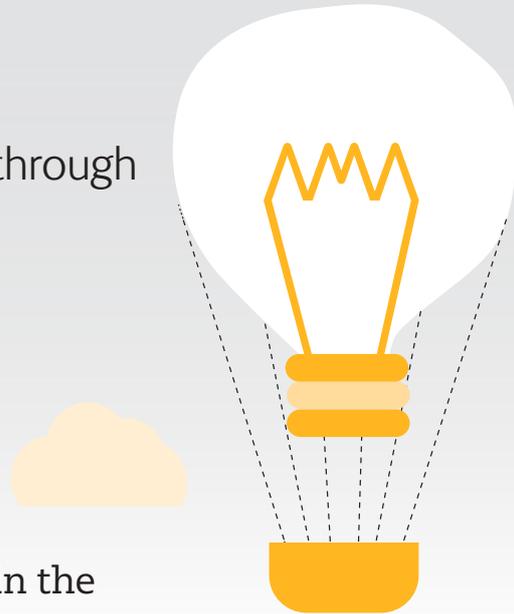


Vision quest

Discover answers through blue sky thinking with *Mel Larsen*



I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free

Michelangelo

One of my greatest pleasures is helping individuals, groups and organisations to describe (and attain) the future they really want. I have supported this process of shaping a Vision countless times. A bit like being a midwife of dreams, it's gratifying to watch a new-born idea mature and manifest years later.

A personal or company vision gives you a sense of how things could be. It's your ideal future, it says what you, or even the world, could become (as opposed to your mission statement which reminds you of your more immediate purpose in terms of who, what, why and where). Einstein famously called the imagination a 'preview of life's coming attractions' which hints at the confidence required to design a great vision.

A new Vision can be shared as an image, written as a statement or spoken out loud spontaneously to an audience of thousands. It may also be a private thought. I am a fan of all these methods. It doesn't really matter how it is brought to life as long as it opens up a new future and is true to the heart and gut of those who own it.

Reality leaves a lot to the imagination

John Lennon

I've seen so many dull vision statements over the years, it appears that even talented executives, strangely enough, view the vision statement as a necessary evil, or worse, have ceased to be led by inspiration themselves.

I used to feel that the idea of having a vision was a bit 'airy fairy' and often felt embarrassed talking about Vision statements. I've come to realise that a good Vision is a powerful foundation. Far from a fluffy add-on to a funding application, it's an essential leadership resource. How can you lead anyone to the Promised Land if you can't see it in your mind's eye, hear it pounding in your heart and feel it punching your gut?

Find your fizz

Don't get me wrong, I am a devotee of aims, objectives, strategies and tactics. I enjoy and revere every part of the planning and implementation process but the Vision stage is the boss glass in the champagne fountain of your organisation. Without it there is no flow or fizz.

Got something to say?

Vision is often to be found hanging out with Innovation, Audacity and Courage. Think of the Google guys or Dr Martin Luther King at the mountain top. Here are some vision statements with fantastically bold attitude:

Ken Blanchard Companies – *to be the number one advocate in the world for human worth in organisations.*

Oxfam – *a just world without poverty.*

Wikipedia – *to provide a free encyclopaedia for every single person on the planet in their own language.*

Apparently Nike's vision used to be, *Crush Adidas*. At least it had passion!

Break past the barriers

I've worked with organisations that were hesitant to state what they really wanted to see happen as a result of their work, but without a bit of heart and soul you are in danger of creating another cookie-cutter statement.

There are many common barriers when working on a new Vision. These include:

- Vagueness – a Vision by its nature is warm and fuzzy, but we sometimes want to escape committing to something bigger by having no vision at all.
- Indecision – we say we can't decide on which future we want.
- Hopelessness – we believe that we can't have what we really want.



- Comfort – we don't want to rock the boat or get out of our comfort zone.
- Embarrassment – as I've already mentioned, we feel that talking of visions and the like is just plain silly.
- Auto-pilot – we slap down some words on a plan and then forget about them.

These barriers are largely based on habit or fear. The fear is there for good reason: believing in a shiny new future can leave you open to scorn and ridicule. Creating one requires that you step out of your comfort zone away from your habitual environment and thought-patterns, even if just for a moment.

Share the silly stuff

Once you have your Vision, then comes the challenging work of keeping it alive not just in yourself but in your team and other partners.

A powerful Vision can also be a vulnerable thing: a few months past its earliest inception that bright horizon you got excited about can now seem further away than ever. You need to make time to re-connect with your Vision by (depending on your company culture), discussing it at meetings, digging out the collage you all made together on the away day, playing 'that' piece of music, or hearing from a customer how you've touched their life.

Why would you bother to do all this 'silly stuff'? Because it works. As the Japanese proverb states; 'Vision without action is a daydream. Action

without vision is a nightmare'. In my experience, when people and organisations create a real, shared Vision, they say and do amazing things. They work harder and love it, they are more creative and they care more. Your Vision is your secret fuel – it gives you energy and determination when things get tough and if your Vision is big enough, things probably will get tough.

A true Vision will be both your constant cheerleader and daily tormentor – enjoy the journey!

Top tips on creating a real Vision

- Brainstorm your dreams, don't block anything.
- trust yourself, don't be tempted to be realistic or safe at this stage,
- forget the past – forget about all your old mistakes and disappointments for a moment,
- say something new about the world or your environment,

- think BIG! Be a bit outrageous or in a year's time you will be bored,
- create it or build on it with your team so they own it,
- articulate it in a way that shows passion and daring – think of the bold taglines used in film posters. Do a collage, create a team dance!
- make sure it thrills and/or scares you. ■



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