

ARE VISIONS USEFUL?

Spring 2000

To sell your product or service, you need a vision. To attract investors, you need a vision. To market yourself, you need a vision. In this article, I give simple steps to articulate your vision, assess your organization, and reinforce core values.

All successful leaders have a vision for their businesses, projects or teams. In fact, you wouldn't be a leader if you didn't have vision, if you couldn't see exciting possibilities not only in your product or services, but also in your people. And, yet, many leaders when asked to create a vision statement for their team tend to minimize the importance of this process. They often give it lip service, so they can get back to the "real work."

An in-depth, thoughtful vision process can be a major motivator. An authentic vision comes from your soul, your team's soul, and touches the heart. A team that is emotionally moved by their vision has the strength to overcome the rough spots and the ups and downs any business faces. When the team has a clear vision for the business, they are creating a picture of the future. They can then work backwards, identifying priorities and what needs to be done to actualize the end result.

Having facilitated many strategic planning and visioning processes for my clients, I have found the following to be a blueprint for a successful visioning process. To know the potential and possibilities of our organization, we have to access

where we are, our strengths, our vulnerabilities, our competition and society's trends.

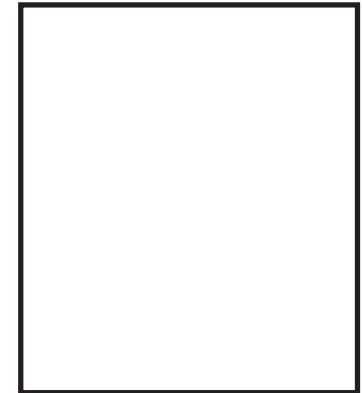
Step 1: Conduct a thorough internal and external environmental scan.

- a. Identify all stakeholders
- b. Analyze stakeholder needs and impact
- c. Administer a reliable employee satisfaction survey
- d. Conduct customer focus groups
- e. Identify key questions for environmental scan
- f. Seek input from stakeholder representatives
- g. Consider using an organizational assessment consultant

Although many teams, projects, and even divisions of companies are not required to develop vision statements, they can be helpful in creating identity and aligning priorities. A vision is a picture of the future we seek to create, described in the present tense, as if it were happening now. It shows where we want to go in the next few years, and what we will be like when we get there. The word comes from the Latin "videre," to see.

Criteria to consider in writing a vision statement include: strategic focus and market place competitive advantage, adding value, building on current strengths, and embracing the organizational values. Vision should provide the driving force. It should be clear, specific and simple. Everyone in the organization should be able to speak it, feel it, act on it, and integrate it.

by Marilyn Manning



Examples of some of my clients' vision statements developed in our strategic planning process:

"We will strive to insure that the City of Gilroy is a safe, clean, prosperous, well governed city, in which the citizens are involved in the decision-making process." - City of Gilroy

"We are an educational institution with the resources to provide our distinct services to the community at large." - Palo Alto Jr. Museum & Zoo

"To be the leader in providing high quality communication support services by exceeding our customers' service expectations." - Lotus

"We envision the Cupertino Educational Endowment Foundation as a leader in entrepreneurial philosophy, leveraging its human and fiscal resources in partnership with others to enhance the quality of education in our community." - CEEF

Step 2: Seek answers to these questions from stakeholders:

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- What kind of company do we want to become?
- What reputation would we have?
- What contribution would we make?
- Would our services, products expand?
- Would customer base change?
- How would our people work together?
- What values would we embody?

It's very challenging to craft a good vision statement. It must reflect present actions while representing the desired future. It must factor in existing competencies while identifying what's missing and how to overcome any limitations.

Vision is based on values. Values affect our actions and choices. They establish how we expect to be treated and how we treat our customers and employees.

Step 3: Hold Company-wide Values Discussions

- design list of values (at least 30)
- have everyone prioritize this list

- identify top priority values
- train leaders in facilitation skills or use an outside facilitator
- hold team discussions to define importance of top values
- executives and employees discuss behavioral expectations
- gain consensus of company code of behavior

Each leader and each team need to define their own expectations. How will they put their values into play? What procedures can they agree to? How will you distribute responsibility?

How will meetings be conducted?
How do problems get resolved?
What are the lines of communication?

Remember to create a vision for your business or team, try the three steps outlined in this article. Conduct your environmental scan, gain consensus on the organizational values, assess stakeholders, and utilize a thorough process to respond to the key visioning questions. Successful teams create and adopt their own codes of behaviors. In the next issue, I will outline how teams can best accomplish this.

Interested in more info about Vision Statements?

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- Vision, Value, and Mission Statements
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