

Why Your Business Needs a Vision Statement

A White Paper from AchieveIt



Picture the companies that have enjoyed lasting success. Which names come to mind? Elite businesses such as Hewlett-Packard, Disney, and Johnson & Johnson have commonalities, but, perhaps, the most important thing they share is strong lasting company visions with values that stand the test of time. Jim Collins, the author of the best-selling management tomes, “Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies,” “Good to Great,” and Great by Choice,” once wrote, “truly great companies understand the difference between what should never change and what should be open for change, between what is genuinely sacred and what is not.” (i)

The Rationale of Vision Statements:

A vision statement encapsulates the future of an organization and serves as the framework for strategic, operational, and business planning. In order to

preserve an organization’s ideals and inspire employees toward success, business leaders must first understand what it takes to craft a fail-proof vision statement. Vision is critical for strategy and execution. Only when firm in the knowledge of your organization can you plan where you’d like to go, and map a route to get there.

A well-rounded vision statement takes a unique recipe: equal parts mission and values paired with your envisioned future for the company. The company mission articulates the purpose of the organization – why the company exists – while the envisioned future is what you hope to achieve and become. It is important not to confuse the two, as the hallmarks of a successful vision are precision and clarity. A great vision statement is built on the back of a strong, clear mission. So, you already have a mission statement that establishes the company in the present. What about the future? A proper vision statement is comprised of two elements: 1.) a detailed, descriptive picture of the future you aspire to, and 2.) massive, scary, long-term goals. It is

important when painting this detailed picture of the future to dream big -the bigger the better- even if you feel your goals aren’t attainable. The boldest vision ever articulated by any political leader was from John F. Kennedy/ On May 25, 1961, in his address to Congress, the president challenged, “I believe that this

When dreaming up possibilities, ask yourself the following questions:

- In 5 or 10 years, what would we love to see?
- What should this company look like in the future?
- What do we want to be known for?
- What should we have achieved by then?
- Do we find this vision it exciting?
- Does it incite our employees to further action?
- Does it get our juices flowing?

nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth” (iii). This goal was realized on July 20, 1969, when Neil Armstrong placed the first human footprint on the moon.

You will find the most visionary companies use bold, time-bound vision statements as a rallying point for their organizations. These large-scale goals are highly focused, easily understood by all, and tangible within the next 10 years. By setting the vision target date five to 10 years into the future, you enable the team to think beyond the current capabilities of the organization and the current market environment.

Do **not** lower your standards. These big-picture goals should have a 50 to 75 percent achievability rate; only through great work should they be attainable. The goals should be compelling in their own right, enough to survive leadership changes if necessary. After the

assassination of John F. Kennedy, the NASA engineers continued their tireless efforts to put a man on the moon; their own passion for the goal existed even in the absence of a dynamic leader.

How do you motivate others to commit to a goal five to 10 years in the future? The answer is to verbalize the most delicious, vivid, and compelling picture of the future you can possibly describe. What are your wildest dreams for the company? How would you describe them? Henry Ford painted a perfect example of the vision he sought for his company when he delivered this speech: “When I’m through, everybody will be able to afford [a car], and everyone will have one. The horse will have disappeared from our highways, the automobile will be taken for granted ... [and we will] give a large number of men employment at good wages.” (iv) More than 100 years later, Ford Motor Company is still one of the biggest car brands in existence.

Your company’s vision statement is not only your key to strong,

lasting success, but also your guiding light. It will serve as the destination for all of your planning efforts – whether strategic, operational, or business – and link back to your mission through the plan itself.

 **References**

(i) Collins, James C. and Porras, Jerry L. “Building Your Company’s Vision” Harvard Business Review (1996): (2-15). Online. (page 2)

(ii) Collins, James C. and Porras, Jerry L. “Building Your Company’s Vision” Harvard Business Review (1996): (2-15). Online. (page 3)

(iii) http://www.nasa.gov/vision/space/features/jfk_speech_text.html

(iv) Collins, James C. and Porras, Jerry L. “Building Your Company’s Vision” Harvard Business Review (1996): (2-15). Online. (page 10)

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