

The
**Story of
Vision**
for
Entrepreneurs

Why Your Revolutionary Product Idea
is Not a Leadership Vision

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Introduction

The Story of Vision

The *story of vision* explains how group members contribute effort to make a meaningful change become real. There are three areas that entrepreneurs and founders neglect in telling the story of vision.

1. To not tell the full story.
2. To not use the right words, expressions, and ideas.
3. To not use the right forms and frequency of storytelling.

Solution 1: The Complete Story of Vision

A complete story of vision is not just a product idea. It connects individual employees' efforts and the meaningful change that the product provides to the customer. This change occurs only when the individual tasks, and the group's work as a whole, are performed with excellence.

The *five factors* tell the complete story of vision:

- The change, or the physical way that the world is different because of the group's product.
- The worth, or the meaningful experiences and value that this change creates for customers as human beings.
- The possibility, or the way that the group as a whole can achieve this meaningful change.

- Individual contributions, or the way that individual tasks contribute to the group's possibility.
- Your belief, or how you as a leader show that you are committed to making the worthwhile change become real.

When we tell the complete story of vision, members of the group understand how their efforts contribute, through the group's shared product or service, to a worthwhile change in the world. This gives meaning and value to the work, and allows vision to become a standard of excellence that justifies motivation and high performance. It also creates individual identity and community among the members of the group.

To do this, we must seek out the words of the vision and the ways that we tell it by:

- Listening in the right places for all five factors.
- Synthesizing the words that we hear into stories.
- Sharing these stories with each member of the group in a way that he or she understands.

The SEEING EXERCISE Writing Your Story of Vision helps you identify the five factors for your vision.

Solution 2: Cultivating, not Creating, a Vision

We do not come up with the story of vision ourselves. This is because we experience our product idea only from our perspective. Our customers experience the product from their own perspectives, and the members of the group experience the process of creating the product from their own perspectives. To tell a story of vision that listeners understand, we must use the words and ideas that match their perspectives. To find these words, we have to seek them out among those people.

As leaders, our role is to synthesize the words and ideas that we find in customers and members of the group with each other and with our own experiences of the product. We must develop our ability to listen and gather the words, ideas, and expressions of the story.

The SEEING EXERCISE Meaning-Making in the Group helps you practice seeking out the words of vision in your employees.

Solution 3: Sharing the Vision

The forms that we use to tell the story, and the frequency which we do so, determines how well the vision will become a single, shared understanding within all members of the group. Our goal is to create a shared vision which replaces the individual visions of members.

We use forms whenever we talk about the five factors of vision. For example, we might give feedback to an employee about how his low performance resulted in an inferior product. This connects factor 4, individual contributions, through the other factors to factor 1, the change. We might talk about an excellent customer story, to demonstrate the value and worth of the change – factors 1 and 2, the worth and the change. We might show how one person's tasks depend on other people, which connects factor 3, the possibility, to factor 4, individual contributions.

We may also use forms other than words. For example, we post customer stories, or encourage members of the group to share their successes.

THOUGH TOF AT THE RIGHT MOMENT

The forms and frequency we use must convey the story to the members of the group. If a form is comfortable and easy for us but is not understood by the members, then it is not useful.

The SEEING EXERCISE Grand and Small Things helps you practice seeking out the words of vision in your employees.

Vision is a Function of Leadership

When leadership does not create a shared vision, then individual members create their own explanations for their work's plan and meaning. These individual visions contradict each other and prevent the group from aligning towards a single outcome. Leadership is the unique role of guiding this function towards a shared, group-focused expression.

Vision provides direction through two expressions: *logical planning* and the *meaning of work*. Planning allows members to see how their specific tasks contribute to the quality of the final product, while meaning of work shows that their efforts create a valuable change in the lives of customers.

When vision is a shared understanding among the members of the group, they can work together towards a single goal. Vision establishes a *standard of excellence* that creates

accountability among the members of the group. Shared vision builds *identity and community* among the members of the group. Together, these effects produce excellence in individual tasks and the group's output.

Measuring Our Storytelling Successes

Any employee should be able to tell the complete story of vision for his or her position. However, no member of the group is able to create this shared vision. That is your unique responsibility as a leader. We know that our storytelling is successful when we hear employees use the words and ideas that we have shared. We also know that members internalize the story when we see them make decisions based on the shared vision, and working with excellence towards the single goal.

Cultivating a shared vision is the first of the three leadership functions, and it is the foundation upon which the other two functions build effective work. Telling the story of vision is one third of what it means to be a leader.

SEEING EXERCISE

Writing Your Story of Vision

Vision begins with listening and ends with sharing. Everything in the middle is how we assemble what we hear into forms that make sense to others. This exercise assesses your understanding of your own perspective of the story of vision to reveal areas that need greater development.

Imagine how you would explain to a stranger each of the five factors for your organization. This description exists only when its members create an excellent product or service, not an average or lesser quality output.

The Change

- What is the meaningful change that your group creates when it performs with excellence?
- What is physically different in the world when members complete their work and provide it to a customer?
- What is physically different in the customer's life?

The Worth

- How does the change make the customer's life better?
- What value do they find in the group's work when they receive the excellent product or service?

- What can they do or feel now that they did not before?

The Possibility

- What does an excellent outcome look like for the customer?
- What aspects of the combined product or service make it excellent?
- How is this different than an average or unsatisfactory output?

Individual Contributions

(There will be multiple answers for these questions.)

- How does each person's tasks contribute to this excellent outcome?
- How is group excellence in the final product limited if an individual lacks excellence?

Your Belief

- Do you believe the members of the group are capable of achieving excellence?
- How do you communicate this?

Excellence Exemplified

Think of a single customer experience that captures all of the change and worth. Imagine this as a story, where you described the customer's interaction and feelings from the time they first encountered your organization through the full use of the product or service. Stories are more powerful than commands or requests, and this story communicates the first two factors.

- What characteristics would the most excellent product or service have?
- How would it be different from average or poor outputs?
- How would those characteristics impact the life of the customer?

These questions should get you an answer to the following:

What worthwhile change does the customer experience when they receive an excellent product or service from your organization?

SEEING EXERCISE

Meaning-Making in the Group

The first challenge of vision is to seek out the words that make up the story. We do not invent these words ourselves: we find them. The goal of this exercise is to reveal the meaning that members of the group make themselves based on shared meaning and not individual factors.

These moments are one of the sources of powerful versions of the story of vision, and we as leaders should incorporate these forms of meaning into our own telling of the story. When we know where to look for this meaning, we can seek out the moments when it is in front of us. This makes it easy for us to find the words to the story of vision, and then create a shared vision that provides identity and community to the group.

Think of a time when the members see their work in a positive way.

- When do the members of the group talk with pride about their work?
- What words, ideas and expressions do they use when they tell these stories?
- What value and worth do these stories reveal that members find in their work?
- Is this worth from a meaningful change for the

customer? If not, where does it come from?

- What events or circumstances trigger them to feel this pride, and which events or circumstances do they feel able to share?
- Are these understandings related to the customer or to other members of the group?
- How do the members' individual tasks connect to the successes they describe in their stories?
- Do the stories celebrate individual success or group success? How does this affect the motivations of the group's members?

SEEING EXERCISE

Grand and Small Things

There are times when we talk about grand things, and there are times when we talk about small things. Vision exists in both, but in different ways.

When we talk about grand things, we explain why. We show progress towards the outcome, we connect members to the group and each other, and we point out the worth and value of the work. We motivate and inspire.

When we talk about small things, we tell what happens next. The next action, the next day, the next challenge. The steps that the group must take. And while we explain the context of these steps towards a larger outcome, our focus on the small things is to give clear direction. Expectations, activities, communication. The small things are the process of performing and combining tasks.

These two perspectives are not opposed, but they require a different focus and approach. For each of these moments, the following exercise directs our attention to the relevant places. As with all doing exercises, repetition makes the thought process here become second nature.

Think about an upcoming situation where you feel that the group's members will need to understand the meaning of their work, and the plan or steps necessary to perform with excellence.

Words, Ideas, Expressions

Is there a specific challenge that they need to overcome? How will they know that they have achieved excellence in this challenge?

Do the members need the emotional inspiration of a grand thing? Do they already know what to do and need inspiration to excel?

Or do they need to concrete, deliberate planning of a small thing? Do they need clarity and direction to accomplish something new?

What do you need to say to match the specific circumstances? What is going on that needs to be included in the members' meaning-making?

Which of the five factors are necessary to provide what the members of the group need? How do these factors connect to each other within the story?

Frequency

Why do you need to talk about it now?

Will this event occur only once? What is unique and special about this moment?

Will this occur again, or has it occurred in the past? If so, what triggers will indicate a similar event is occurring?

Form

Are you the proper person to tell this story? Are there others who have credibility or experience that would be more effective storytellers?

What is the most effective form to use telling this story? Are there forms other than your own words? How would these methods affect the way that the story is understood?

The answers to these questions should form a plan for your storytelling.