

How to Create a Powerful Vision for Your Company

**“IF YOU DON’T KNOW WHERE YOU’RE GOING, YOU’LL
WIND UP SOMEPLACE ELSE.”**

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“What do you want?”

“You mean for me or for my business?”

“Either. Both. What do you want?”

“Man...That’s a good question...”

As a business coach, it’s the first question I ask every prospective client. Such a simple question, yet very few of the business owners I meet have a clear idea of what they want or where their businesses are going.

They are indeed likely to end up “somewhere else,” along with everyone who is affected by the business. “Somewhere else” might be a happy place, but likely not.

If owners don’t know where the business is going, employees surely don’t know. When employees don’t know, they must rely on their own judgment to guide their decisions and actions.

The result often is people working at cross-purposes and suffering from unclear expectations, second-guessing, frustration, wasted effort, mistrust and general chaos. Notice that none of those are good things.

IDENTIFY THE VISION

The solution for those difficulties is to identify a meaningful vision for your businesses, to capture it in a vision statement, and to focus everyone’s efforts on achieving it.

The most compelling vision statements paint a picture, not of the business itself, but rather of an ideal that results when it has accomplished its purpose.

Confused?

Let me illustrate with examples of great vision statements.

The vision statement of the Citizens' Advisory Board in my hometown is:

"Every child safe, well and stable."

How's that for an ideal? If you worked for the CAB, would you understand your purpose? Would that vision guide your decisions and actions? (You've probably never heard of the CAB, but by reading just six words you have already shaped an opinion, haven't you?)

The vision statement of Google is:

"All the information in the world organized and accessible."

Do you suppose that vision had anything to do with Google Search, Google Drive, Google Earth, Google Maps, Gmail, Google Calendar, Google Reviews, YouTube, Image Search, and all of the other Google products, including any they may have invented since I started typing this paper? (How did I find Google's vision statement? I Googled it!)

DON'T MISUNDERSTAND

It is unlikely that a business will ever fully achieve the lofty ideals captured in its vision statement.

There will never be a time when every child is safe, well and stable, or when all the world's information is organized and accessible, but

those visions provide the ideals that focus decisions and actions within the organizations.

Writing a vision statement for your business is easy. The hard part is clarifying what you want. If you haven't done that, but write your vision statement anyway, the result is likely to be a confusing jumble that is at best worthless and at worst damaging.

Let me show what I mean with examples from two companies, Disney and Apple. Both had it right, then blew it.

The vision statement of The Walt Disney Company used to be:

"A smile on every face."

That was a wonderfully clear and succinct statement of an ideal. Would it give guidance and purpose to people working at Disneyland? I think so. Unfortunately, that is no longer Disney's vision statement. They have messed it up. A quick search will turn up numerous vision statements for Disney, including one that says, in part:

"...using our portfolio of brands to differentiate our content, services and consumer products, we seek to develop the most creative, innovative and profitable entertainment experiences and related products in the world..."

Differentiate? We seek? Related products? And who wins if there is a conflict between "profit" and "innovative?" Confusion is apparent. That puffery is not nearly as clear and useful as "A smile on every face." (I'll wager no one at Disney even knows the new version, let alone takes guidance from it.)

The vision statement for Apple as expressed by Steve Jobs was:

"Think differently to change the world."

Apple's new vision under CEO Tim Cook is:

"We believe that we are on the face of the earth to make great products and that's not changing. We are constantly focusing on innovating. We believe in the simple, not the complex. We believe that we need to own and control the primary technologies behind the products that we make, and participate only in markets where we can make a significant contribution..."

And blah, blah, blah. for another 103 words.

CAPTURE THE VISION STATEMENT

DIRECT

To write your vision statement, begin by asking: "What is an ideal resulting from my business achieving its purpose? The confusion you feel trying to answer that question is the same confusion causing chaos in your organization.

Think about the result you really want. Think about a result that will provide inspiration and purpose, not only to you, but also to your employees.

If you are struggling, try this: Imagine that in five years your company wins a prestigious national award. Then answer these two questions:

1. Who awarded it? (real or imagined)
2. What for?

Keep your answers simple, short and descriptive, but do not settle for platitudes such as "happy customers," "quality products," or "the best service."

Nobody pays attention to platitudes.

INDIRECT

You may want to consider creating your vision statement around an "indirect" ideal. For example, a client of mine has a goal of a specific amount of profit and growth over the next five years.

His employees may not find profit and growth as compelling as he does, so, instead of "Profit and growth" as a vision statement, he chose to describe an ideal that will result in profit and growth.

His vision statement is:

"The employer of choice for professionals in the _____ industry."

He and his employees all buy into that vision. It guides their decisions and actions.

"Do what it takes to attract and keep top professionals."

My client understands that attracting and keeping top professionals leads to repeat customers, which leads to profit and growth.

Below are a few other samples of indirect visions statements from several of my clients:

"The most efficient cabinet component manufacturer in the world"

"Known for unmatched communication"

"Known for the fastest response times in the industry"

"Every customer a raving fan who provides referrals without being asked"

"World peace and cultural understanding through a compassionate,
profitable IT staffing experience"

THE BONUS

There is a significant bonus to having a strong, well-written vision.

Patagonia's mission statement is:

"Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis."

Those few words reveal a lot about what Patagonia values.

Like-minded people love to buy from Patagonia as much for what it stands for as what it sells. Their logo is like a badge of honor for Patagonia disciples.

A word of caution: Your vision statement will provide clarity to calm chaos and attract loyal customers – IF - it clearly represents your true purpose.

If it does not, it will rat you out as a hypocrite by clarifying the contrast between your stated intentions and your actions.

IS YOUR VISION CLEAR?

What about you and your company? Do you have a clear and compelling ideal? Do your employees and customers know what it is?

If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to mail me at Martin@annealbc.com or visit www.annealbc.com



Martin Holland

Martin Holland is the son of a successful entrepreneur. He grew up hearing about margins and markets, R&D and sales, risk and return on investment. He learned to love the language and rigors of business and grew to believe that business is both the most human of all endeavors and the highest calling. After selling a company in 2011, Martin became a coach in order to help other owners build profitable businesses that do not require their day-to-day involvement.

A native of Norman, Martin earned a B.A. degree from Hastings College in Hastings, Nebraska and a Masters in Business Administration degree from the University of Oklahoma. Over the past 7 years he has written business plans that have raised over \$52.4 million in bank and investor financing. He has helped 157 (and counting) business owners reduce stress and increase performance through clarity of purpose, better marriages, more money, and more free time away from the business.