

VISION

If we cannot see

Where we are going

It's very challenging

To safely

Arrive

We will be the world's leading organisation in our industry through loyal customers, passionate staff and satisfied shareholders

... is not a vision statement.

Which is somewhat surprising, given that it seems to be the standard formula followed by leadership teams and business consultants.¹ It seems perfectly logical as an ambition.

Which explains why it is not visionary.

Vision goes beyond logic. To inspire others forward it needs to not only make sense but to connect on an emotive level.

All too often leadership teams head away to an off-site retreat to develop the organisational vision. When they return the vision statement is carefully crafted onto the walls and into presentations. Everyone assembles to see the new vision.

The vision is presented. No one is moved. Everyone goes back to work. The vision is forgotten.

This is not what a vision should be.

A compelling vision needs to provide... vision.

Enabling others to see a big picture view of the future state of the organisation.

To be number one is a generic ambition. A metric goal. It does not provide any clarity as to how the organisation will look when the vision is reached.

A powerful vision guides teams to navigate through uncertainty. Like a guiding light through the haze, it provides clarity as to where to aim and head towards, even though everything around may be shifting and changing.

Making the visionary future clearer.

Vision Without Perfect Clarity

It is a fine line between providing clarity of direction and limiting self-determination.

People need to be able to see themselves in your vision.

After all, vision is a picture of the future state of your organisation, project or team. If your people cannot easily and compellingly see themselves in that future vision, it means they might not see themselves in your future.

So if you make your future too clear and precisely defined, then the risk is your people feel there is no scope for them to define and control their own destiny.

Conversely if it is too vague and open, the likelihood is your people will not be clear or inspired as to what they are working towards.

The balance lies somewhere in between. Not as vague as we will be number one, not so specific as to define exactly what the future products and services you will be delivering will be.

Strategy in Action

VISIONING

Uber began as a ride-sharing service. As the business expanded into other areas from Uber Eats to autonomous vehicle research, their team was inspired and guided by a vision defined as Bits and Atoms² which was vividly described in words...

“Consider the bit – the building block of the digital world. It was invented just 70 years ago. Yet in its short life, it has changed the way we communicate, do business and live almost every aspect of our lives.

“For Uber, the bit represents our technology. It’s complex, precise and advanced. But when it’s expressed, it is effortless and refined. And if you think the bit is a big deal, consider the atom. Born 13.8 billion years ago, the atom is responsible for everything – from the BLT to moms everywhere, to New York City. And for us, the atom signifies our rapidly improving cities, the goods we move from place to place, and most importantly, the people we serve.

“Until a few short years ago, atoms and bits existed in entirely different worlds but then, something happened. At Uber we asked, what if we brought these two worlds together? What would that look like? It looks like this...

“We are able to create safe, low-cost transportation options like Uber Pool and Uber X. We are able to create efficient and more reliable ways of getting people the things they need. We are able to deliver fresh cooked meals from the most popular iconic restaurants within minutes – and someday safe, efficient movement of people and things at a giant scale.

“Most of us don’t think about bits or atoms much, if ever. We think about how to get from here to there. The people in our lives. The millions of tiny dramas that play out across the world each day. The human stuff. Uber ultimately succeeds because we think about the human stuff, first. But the way we do it, that’s our secret.

“We leave no bit or atom unturned to create industries that serve people – and not the other way around.”

Far more powerful and visionary than a generic aspiration to be the world’s leading mobility platform. With specific detail from the past and present used to then visualise a common strategic thread running through into the future.

Try speaking or writing your own version of this short story. Re-read Uber’s visionary story, this time also thinking about your own team’s journey to get to this point and then visioning into the future.

Inspire Forward

Your vision can take many different forms, such as a visionary story like Uber’s of their journey from the past to the present and then into the future.

Or it might be a short vision statement describing the future state being created, like Wikipedia’s vision for their Wikimedia Foundation – “Imagine a world in which every single human being can freely share in the sum of all knowledge.”³

Ultimately a compelling vision paints a picture of the future.

In the minds and hearts of others.

Inspiring forward.

With vision.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Aspiring to be number one is not a vision.
- A compelling vision provides a big picture view of the future.
- This provides clarity of direction through the haze of uncertainty.
- Clarity of vision needs to be balanced with not overly constraining.
- Visions take many forms from short statements to vision stories.