



Let your North Star lead you to greatness

A company Vision, like the North Star, can be a guiding light for employees. It should keep them inspired, motivated, loyal, and pointed in the right direction. A company Vision doesn't need to be about its current products or offerings; it should focus on the opportunities that it can offer or deliver in the future, while keeping customers in mind.

Here's little tale that I hope will paint a picture for you. The company in this story isn't real, but its problem is very real for many organizations I've seen.

Once there was a company that was stuck. It was called the McPherson Aerosol Can Company. It wanted to grow, but since it made only aerosol cans, the firm's leaders knew they could only do so much with their product—change the nozzle, tweak the can shape, or put different liquids inside. McPherson had a hard time differentiating itself from any other company making aerosol cans, and employees couldn't advance because there was virtually no growth. Morale was poor.

What made things worse is that material costs kept going up, and when overseas suppliers came to the market with less expensive aerosol cans, that squeezed profit margins even more. As for employees, not only did no one get a raise, everyone also had to do more work during regular shifts to make up the difference of the company's cost-cutting methods. The future of the company and its employees was looking bleak.

Then something happened. Management was desperate to grow the business, and employees also knew that growth would help them elevate their work lives. So a young employee went to his boss and suggested that

the company change its name from McPherson Aerosol Can Company to McPherson Container Corporation. The young man thought that altering the name would open up all sorts of markets. After all, if they could contain things in a highly pressurized aerosol can, they could contain just about anything.

So the name was changed and the new name—McPherson Container Corporation—prompted the company’s new Vision: “We Contain All Liquids, Solids, and Gases.”

What happened? With its new name and Vision, the company found that it had opened up virtually every market that had to do with a container and was no longer restricted to aerosol cans. From milk cartons, paint cans, and cardboard boxes to plastic bags and shipping containers, there was virtually no end to the products that needed to be contained. The real kicker was that the container industry was stuck in the past, without much reinvention going on. With new designs and enhanced capabilities, the McPherson Container Corporation opened up a bright new future. It could take advantage of all kinds of innovation and improvements.

With changes like these, the company entered a golden field of opportunities. And it began with a change of name and a Vision that became a North Star for all thoughts, decisions, and actions.

What do you think your company can do?

Having your Vision clear not only in your head but also clear in the minds of your team and all your employees will create energy, excitement, and a positive force that will generate amazing results, both in profits and in creating a winning culture.

Here’s another simple example: Suppose you owned a limousine company whose Vision was “Taking People from Here to There.” What if you switched your Vision to: “Making Every Occasion Special.” I bet that Vision would change the way you did things, by aligning your thoughts, decisions, and actions with “Making Every Occasion Special.” Just by embracing that new Vision, you would have a different and far more popular and successful business.

How important is it to have a compelling Vision around which your employees focus all their efforts? It's crucial, as you can see in the following fable.

The story of the three masons

In early Babylonia, the king had a Vision: to commission the world's finest and largest stone temple. This was to be his and his people's legacy to the world.

To ensure that the temple was in alignment with the Vision of the king, his highest aide interviewed masons from the three different contractors who were responsible for the project's construction. He asked each one what he did.

The first mason's response was, "I am just stacking brick after brick. I don't know why we are doing this project or what it will become. My boss just told me to stack bricks. It will probably never get done, and I think it is a waste of time." The king's assistant was dumbfounded to hear the first mason's opinion. Didn't everyone know about the king's Vision of the temple?

Talking to mason number two produced a similar result. His response was, "My job is to lay bricks in a straight row. I am not sure what the final project will look like, and I don't know when it is supposed to be completed. I really don't care. My workers and I just do what we are told. The project means nothing to us; it's just a job that puts a roof over our heads and feeds us." Again, the king's assistant was surprised to hear the second mason's comments. Couldn't the mason and his workers see what was being created? It was a temple on the grandest scale. The best marble was ready to be laid on the floors; fine sculptures, carpets, and murals were on hand to decorate this magnificent building. There were clues everywhere about what was going on. The king's assistant was astounded by this mason's inability to understand the Vision of the project and see what the temple would look like.

Asked about his responsibilities, mason number three told the king's assistant, "I am doing my part in creating a masterpiece. I am carefully laying one brick at a time, paying attention to every detail because I am excited to be involved in this project. My efforts will be a part of the greatest stone temple

ever built, which will help serve the world and the world's people for many generations to come.”

Finally! Someone got it! The third mason understood the king's Vision and was not only inspired to work on the temple but was also honored to be a part of the project. He was doing his finest work. The king's assistant knew that mason number three and his team would do an outstanding job on their part of the project. If only the other masons had the same Vision as the third, this would truly be the grandest temple in the world.

If a company has a Vision to “create the world's finest and largest stone temple,” then using inferior products, shoddy workmanship, or uninspired masons will not work.

Think about your own company, your Vision, and your employees. Which of the three masons would you want working in your company? It's obvious you would select mason number three for your team, since that person would share your Vision and enthusiasm.

Now ask yourself, “Which masons are currently working within our company?”

The reality is that you probably have several employees like mason number one, as well as a few who resemble the others. It is frightening to think about how many of them don't have a clue about your company's Vision!

Of course, you want as many of the third kind of mason on your team and in your company as you can get. But you also want them to inspire and convert the others. How do you do that?

Aligning your employees to your Vision will allow them to “own” what they are doing, while increasing their overall happiness and reducing management or eliminating it altogether.

When there is a grand and purposeful Vision, there is less need for supervision or rules.



A great Vision will always attract people

The greater the Vision, the more good people it will attract. A great Vision is something people will like and will want to be part of. It's as simple as that. What is your Vision?

As you can see from the preceding story, it is just as important for your employees to know your Vision as it is for you.

Take a moment and think about each of the following questions:

- Which type of employee do you have in your company? (Mason number one, two, or three?)
- Are your employees in alignment with the Vision of your company?
- Do your employees even know the Vision?
- Do your employees take responsibility for what they do, or do they just do what they are told?
- How do your employees feel about what they are doing?

Knowing the answers to these questions will provide you with a pretty clear indication of the employees on your team.

Having a Vision for your company is a pretty simple concept, but it will help get all employees' hearts beating in the same rhythm, and their efforts moving in the same direction, so it's important to have a Vision.

A great Vision gives everyone in the organization something to focus their thoughts, decisions, and actions on, and once their focus is on the Vision, unlimited possibilities open up. Without that focus, opportunities are missed, and what ends up being created may not be what was intended.