

Corporate Vision Creating Alignment throughout Your Organization

Perhaps one of the most overlooked and undervalued documents in any organization is that of organizational vision. As we explore this topic, let me start by describing our definition of organizational vision, and differentiating that from mission and values. The mission of an organization is truly a statement of why the organization is in business. What is its purpose and what services or goods does it provide to its customers or constituent base. In short the mission is the why the organization exists. The values of an organization define the characteristics by which the organization operates. Such things as honesty, respect, trust, collaboration, fairness are examples of values that an organization exhibits in its day-to-day operations. The organizational vision describes in detail, what anyone who comes in contact with the organization may expect to encounter. A strong organizational vision will describe the relationship that the reader has or may have with the organization.

A powerful organizational vision has many components. First, the vision should be set in a future timeframe, such as 10 or 20 years. The vision, even though set in a future timeframe, should be stated in the present tense language. Research shows that visions created in this way are compelling, empowering and energizing. Not just for the people inside the organization, but for the customers, clients, suppliers, and anyone who comes in contact with the organization. A powerful organizational vision may be as much as a page long. It is certainly more than one paragraph or one sentence as we often see today. Typically the first paragraph of an organizational vision will summarize everything else that is further elaborated in the following paragraphs of the vision. This first paragraph will often serve as the organization's vision for the purposes of advertising, marketing brochures, business cards, and perhaps even websites. However, it is important to have the following paragraphs elaborate on the points that are contained in the summary paragraph. In this way each and every person who comes in contact with the organization can understand exactly how they relate to the organization itself.

As the organization vision is developed it should describe the organizations relationship with its customers or clients. It should also describe the relationship with employees, what types of employees, what motivates employees, and how employees are valued in the organization. In addition, the vision should describe the relationship with suppliers and vendors, and anyone who is involved in helping the organization achieve its ultimate vision. Another segment of the vision should describe how the organization intends to monitor and improve organizational processes for the benefit of its customers/clients. The vision should also describe success criteria measured in a number of ways such as sales volume, gross revenue, profit, number of clients served, impact made by the organization, its' employees and its' network. When an organizational vision is described in this manner, it becomes very easy to overlay a balanced scorecard type of performance management system to ensure that the organization is on its' way to achieving its' ultimate vision.

So the next question might be, how do you create such a vision? Do you as the owner create this vision on your own in a vacuum? After all, you are the owner of the

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business and true business leadership is squarely your domain. Let me suggest that there is a much more powerful way to create a compelling and energizing vision for your organization no matter its size. This more powerful way of developing an organizational vision is through a collaborative process. One that includes employees, suppliers and customers. Yes it is your vision as the owner and leader of the organization. It is up to you to set the major vector directions. However, by opening dialogue with employees, customers and suppliers you will achieve a much more robust vision that is more widely understood, energizing and empowering for your organization. You may choose to do this in a 1/2 to 1 day retreat setting, or you may define a few bullet points around each of the aspects mentioned above, focused on that future date and then circulate that for input. Ask your employees, customers, and suppliers to describe what they would like to see with in that vector direction context at the future date. Ask them to provide snippets or key aspects of what they see in the future. Whether you're doing this in a retreat setting or by circulating documents and one-on-one interviews, the point is to begin to see the future that you want in the words that you use to describe all aspects of your business at a future point in time. Remember to write the final version of the vision in present tense format as if you're already there. This is important to give you a constant gauge for whether you are making progress or even have actually accomplished your vision. It is also important, because this puts a true "stake in the ground" and is much more compelling and definitive than "we hope to", or "we aspire to". These latter examples can easily be pushed off and wait until another time. If stated in terms of "we are" or "we provide", it is easy to determine whether you are or you provide on any given day.

The power of the collaborative process cannot be overstated. By collaborating on the vision for your organization you actually elevate your leadership position within the organization. By including employees, customers and suppliers in the creation of the organizational vision, you are in fact creating a vision larger than yourself. You are also creating alignment and empowering individuals to act within that alignment. You are fundamentally changing your role from owner-manager to owner-leader. You are also aligning your most valuable resources, your employees, your suppliers and your customers, into a systems way of thinking and acting to achieve the ultimate vision. You are energizing your customers, suppliers, and employees to be partners in your success, and they are understanding how your success contributes to their success!

Ray Patterson
Capital Consulting Group, llc
518 857-6500
www.CapConsult.net