**What is a Vision Statement for?**

### What we’re trying to achieve when writing a good vision statement includes the following, however not everything applies to every organization/context.

* Creating the pinnacle of the funnel, which every significant action we do going forward will ultimately be contributing towards.
* A memorable and inspirational summary that describes our reason for existence as an organization – one that will help to motivate existing employees and even attract high-quality new ones.
* A succinct statement about what our organization is trying to achieve to help third parties such as investors or the media better understand us.
* A ‘limiter’ that helps us to rule out certain opportunities which do not ultimately contribute to our vision.

## What a good Vision Statement SHOULD be:

### There are a few common rules that pretty much every good Vision Statement will follow:

1. They should be **short** – two sentences at an absolute maximum. It’s fine to expand on your vision statement with more detail, but you need a version that is punchy and easily memorable.
2. They need to be **specific to your business** and describe a unique outcome that only you can provide. Generic vision statements that could apply to any organization won’t cut it (see our examples below for more on this point).
3. Do **not** use words that are open to interpretation.  For example, saying you will ‘maximize shareholder return’ doesn’t actually mean anything unless you specify what it actually looks like.
4. Keep it **simple** enough for people both inside and outside your organization to understand.  No technical jargon, no metaphors, and no business buzz-words if at all possible!
5. It should be **ambitious** enough to be exciting but not too ambitious that it seems unachievable.  It’s not really a matter of time-framing your vision, because that will vary by organization, but certainly, anything that has a timeframe outside of 3 to 10 years should be challenged as to whether it’s appropriate.
6. It needs to **align to the Values** that you want your people to exhibit as they perform their work.  We’ll talk more about Values in a future article – but once you’ve created those Values later on, revisit your Vision to see how well they gel.

## Some not-so-good Vision Statements (and why)

Examples of actual vision statements that could do with a little tweaking.

* *Our company vision is to make every brand more inspiring and the world more intelligent.*

Well, this one gets a tick on the ‘ambitious’ test if nothing else.  But, is it realistic that ‘every brand’ will use the services of this company?  How about ‘making the world more intelligent.’ Let’s try to quantify what that might actually look like.  Or let’s not. Because it’s impossible.  Not to be too harsh though – there are strong elements here; ‘making brands more inspiring’ makes a lot of sense and has some depth.

* *Provide maximum value for our shareholders whilst helping our customers to fulfil their dreams.*

This ‘vision’ could pretty much apply to any company, anywhere (it’s an insurance company in this case – but would you have guessed that?).  It’s sort of like saying ‘Our Vision is to succeed as a business’.  Not wrong – but certainly not inspiring or unique.

* *We are committed to achieving new standards of excellence by providing superior human capital management services and maximizing the potential of all stakeholders – clients, candidates and employees – through the delivery of the most reliable, responsive****….*[the statement continues on]**

It would be quite hard to write a vision statement filled with less tangibility and more subjectivity than this one. ‘New standards of excellence’. ‘Superior human capital management’. ‘Maximising the potential’.  There are simply far too many buzzwords, intangibles, and vaguery here for this to be either memorable or inspiring.

## What is the Process of Writing a Good Vision Statement?

## Step 1: Define what you do as an output

* Start by being exceptionally clear about what it is your organization actually does.
* Be careful to remain ‘output focused’ rather than ‘input focused’.
* For example, Microsoft famously had a vision statement to Put a Microsoft powered computer on every desk in the world (slightly paraphrased).  Strictly speaking what Microsoft ‘does’ is make computer software, but for the purposes of their Vision, they looked forward to the actual outcome of this process – i.e. computers on desks.
* Hypothetical examples:
  + A bakery makes bread. But the outcome is consumers enjoying that bread.
  + A consulting company gives advice.  But the outcome is the success of others based on that advice.
  + A government department does…lots of things. But the outcome is better lives for the citizens they serve.
* *Brainstorm: What is the output of the San Diego/Imperial Region?*

## Step 2: Define what unique twist your organization brings to the above outcome

* Very few products or services these days are truly new – most are more like reinventions of something that exists already, but with a different approach, focus or spin.
* At some point in your organization’s lifespan – someone will have believed that the reason that THIS organization would be successful where others have failed, was because of………something.
* You need to define that something!
* Continuing with the bakery example:
  + So far, our vision statement is looking pretty generic, along the lines of customers enjoying our bread.
  + But why will they enjoy our bread MORE than the bread from the place next door?  Is it because we use centuries-old traditions passed through generations of our family?  Because we only use premium grade locally sourced ingredients?
* *Brainstorm: What is the unique twist to the San Diego/Imperial regional approach?*

## Step 3: Apply some high-level quantification

* A common problem with a not so good vision statement is ironically, that it’s too visionary!  With no possible end in sight (or a totally unrealistic one) – the initial inspiration derived from a good vision statement can quickly turn to frustration or even cynicism among employees and customers.
* That said – don’t be too specific or apply specific metrics at this stage (they will come later in our planning process).
* Continuing with the bakery example:
  + We might want to refine our target audience to ‘every customer who walks through the door’ – that’s fine, or maybe we want to be bolder: ‘every customer within walking distance of a store’.
* *Brainstorm: How might you quantify the San Diego/Imperial regional vision?*

## Step 4: Add relatable, human, ‘real world’ aspects

* OK, your vision statement by this point should be getting pretty close to finished.  But one final trick you can apply to help make it even more memorable is to add a real-life aspect. This will allow people to conjure up a solid mental image to associate with your vision statement.
* Examples – which of the following statements is likely to be more memorable?
  1. To have every working person in the world using Microsoft product.

or…

* 1. A Microsoft powered computer on every desk.
* (b) is more memorable because as you read it, you can actually visualize a computer on a desk.
* There’s nothing wrong with (a) but it’s highly conceptual and thus difficult to transform into a mental picture.
* Another example:
  + Ensure that every customer who leaves our store, does so smiling.
  + Here, using the word ‘smiling’ as opposed to ‘happy’ is powerful, because it conjures a mental image of a person smiling.
* Note, it won’t always be possible to bring this level of tangibility to a good vision statement.
* *Brainstorm: What relatable (human, real-life) attribute can be added to the vision statement?*

## How to Bring your Vision Statement all together

* Let’s finish off with a look at what a completed good vision statement could look like for our bakery. Based on the above:
  + *Producing and selling locally sourced cakes and pies that are so delicious and satisfying, that every customer who leaves our store does so with a smile.*
* If we deconstruct this into our various steps, we can see each at work as follows:
  + Producing and selling locally sourced cakes and pies that are so delicious and satisfying, that every customer who leaves our store does so with a smile.

Step1 – The output  
Step2 – The twist  
Step3 – The quantification  
Step4 – The human connection

* *Activity: bring together the various elements brainstormed in steps 1-4 to craft a regional visions statement*

Source: Blog posting on Cascade web site. Accessed November 9, 2018: <https://www.executestrategy.net/blog/write-good-vision-statement/>