

5 TIPS FOR CREATING A STICKY STRATEGIC VISION

1. **Articulate your organization's "core idea."** A core idea is your "secret sauce"—it informs every aspect of your business. *If it doesn't help employees make decisions, it ain't a core idea.* For instance, Southwest Airlines says they're "THE low-fare airline." Herb Kelleher gave an example of a marketing exec who approached him with some customer survey data. She suggested that Southwest should add a chicken Caesar salad to some of their longer flights. Kelleher asked her, "Will adding a chicken Caesar salad help to make us THE low-fare airline in those markets? Because if it won't, we aren't serving any damn chicken salad." Notice how the core idea helps employees make tradeoffs between 2 competing values: customer satisfaction and economy. For Southwest, economy wins. For Singapore Air, customer satisfaction wins.

2. **Don't zoom out, choose.** Let's say you run a restaurant in Centerville that serves outstanding thin-crust pizza. Your mission: To serve the tastiest pizza in town. But then the chef reminds you that he makes great ravioli—he's frustrated that your mission doesn't reflect it. So you zoom out: To serve the best Italian cuisine in town. But what about your great service? Your birthday parties? Your family-friendly decor? You keep expanding the mission to include all these pieces, until you end up with an unholy statement like this: To create cuisine-related solutions for regionally proximate families. Fight this urge! Don't zoom out! A great vision is specific, and that means making a hard choice. Chip and I once worked with a mental health chain that had 11 core values. Ouch. 11 core values equals 0 core values. Executives want to compromise, so they add in everyone's pet values. Are you willing to make the hard choices among priorities?

3. **Make the vision concrete.** JFK's speech is the Holy Grail: We will put a man on the moon and return him safely within the decade. What a concrete vision! Was there anyone in American who misunderstood? The nonprofit City Year says: One day, the most common

question asked of a 17 year-old in this country will be: "Where are you going to do your year of national service?" Boeing was incredibly concrete (and specific) with its goal for the 727 passenger plane: "The 727 must seat 131 passengers, fly nonstop from Miami to New York City, and land on runway 4-22 at LaGuardia [one of the shortest runways at the time]." Concrete goals like these help to ensure alignment. They ensure everyone shares a common picture of the destination.

4. **Show why employees should care about it.** "ExxonMobil Corporation is committed to being the world's premier petroleum and petrochemical company." Bleh. No one wakes up in the morning excited about that mission. But contrast that with J&J's Credo: "We believe our first responsibility is to the doctors, nurses, and patients, to mothers and fathers and all others who use our products and services." It's easy to see how someone would feel proud to support that mission! And Sony, in the early 1950s, said they wanted to become the company most known for changing the worldwide image

of Japanese products as being of poor quality. J&J and Sony's missions add clarity and motivation.

5. **Consider the virtues of single focus.** Change can happen quickly when leaders orient the company toward a single, bright-line goal. Gordon Bethune, taking over a troubled Continental Airlines, made his team focus on on-time arrivals. Paul O'Neill, taking charge of Alcoa's aluminum empire, made his top priority: No worker accidents. (His team thought he was nuts, but he knew that to prevent accidents, they'd have to understand their operations so well that operational efficiencies would unfold naturally.) In the 1980s, a new director of New York City's troubled subway system declared: No graffiti. He knew that eliminating graffiti would provide a quick and important victory and would, in turn, lead to other achievements. Can you be strategically single-minded?

