

Lesson 15: The lazy vision statement

By Alon Raiz

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Let's be honest. At the beginning of our entrepreneurial journeys, the first few months, if not years, are just about making month-end. If we get through month-end and survive another month, mission accomplished.



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What I have observed over the last 20 years is that, prior to starting a business, most entrepreneurs do create a vision or fantasy in their minds around where they would like to take their businesses. They may go as far as sharing their vision with their friends at dinner parties and, if there are investors in the mix, they will share the vision with them on one slide in a PowerPoint presentation.

But, not two months into the entrepreneurial journey, most entrepreneurs are winded by reality, and the vision goes out the window or, at the very least, gets put on ice. The reality of dealing with day-to-day survival becomes all consuming. Daily entrepreneurial life consists of putting out fires, and dealing with customer complaints, HR matters, cashflow issues, supplier issues and the list goes on. Much like in a new marriage, the passionate romance soon takes a back seat to the reality of surviving the daily grind.

This shift from a vision focus to a practical and tactical focus is foreseeable and normal. But what happens next will determine whether the business thrives or not. In my experience, if entrepreneurs do not rekindle their relationship with their visions within two years of the startup grind, there is a much lower probability of the business thriving. Entrepreneurs are effectively sucked into the vortex of working in the business and not on the business.



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But how do they rekindle their relationship with the vision when it is most often represented as one sentence, the vision statement? Do not get me started on the vision statement!

I think the concept of the vision statement is probably one of the single most disempowering pieces of modern business training around. When asked, any entrepreneur may be able to rattle off their vision statement but, when probed to explain in more detail, they tend to look at you blankly. They have taken no time to mentally sketch out what they are trying to build in deep detail. Very few entrepreneurs have the discipline to write out or graphically represent their visions in detail.

When the reality of the start-up grind begins, the fragile and opaque vision statement evaporates so easily leaving no trace to rekindle or remaster. The consequence is that the entrepreneur begins to aimlessly meander from one month-end to the next. If there had been a more comprehensive recorded vision however, more of the vision would have survived to re-inspire, re-motivate, re-direct after the start-up grind beast had been tamed.

Whenever I work with a new business, the first thing I make sure is worked on and completed is the comprehensive vision. What will the business look like in ten years time? How many divisions, how many departments, how many staff? How will the products evolve? How will the core competencies evolve? Et cetera.

I can spend more than one day with an entrepreneur sketching out their future with them in deep detail. These comprehensive vision documents become the basis for the strategy moving forward, help with higher-quality decision-making, and serve as the compass for the business.

Okay, you have got me started on the vision statement. I can't help myself. The vile and disempowering vision statement is the equivalent of someone asking you where you want to go, and you responding with the lowest level of information possible by simply pointing in a direction. You have not described the end point at all, simply a gross generalisation of the direction.

Hopefully entrepreneurs start a business for a reason, with an intention, and with an inspiring thing they are trying to build. Take the time to build the vision in your head then write it down or sketch it. Get someone to ask you tough questions to bring a level of robustness to that vision, and then use the answers to those tough questions to embellish your vision. Then, and only then, should you begin your journey of colouring between the lines of your expressed vision, correcting some lines and adding new lines to the magnificent vision you are building and completing.

ABOUT ALLON RAIZ

Allon Raiz is the CEO of Raizcorp. In 2008, Raiz was selected as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum, and in 2011 he was appointed for the first time as a member of the Global Agenda Council on Fostering Entrepreneurship. Following a series of entrepreneurship master classes delivered at Oxford University in 2014, 2015 and 2016, Raiz has been recognised as the Entrepreneur-in-Residence at the University of Oxford's Saïd Business School.

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