

CEO Tip: Your (Own) Vision

by Guido Quelle

We can start by writing off the often-cited quote attributed to former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt that “Anyone who has visions should consult a doctor” as the outmoded views of a respected politician.

It goes without saying that carefully adapting and revising the vision of the company he or she is responsible for are among the most essential duties of the CEO. I include the word “carefully” because a vision should not be confused with a strategy, the former being less susceptible to everyday influences and fluctuations. As we understand it, a vision is the most concrete image possible of a desirable future that produces advantages for the company – nothing more, but certainly nothing less.

In many cases there is no corporate vision whatsoever, as a result of which the CEO has to lay the groundwork and create one, as the corporate vision serves as the basis of his or her strategic efforts.

Here are three tips that can help CEOs to make their corporate vision an effective one:

1 Congruency

First of all, and you should of course consider this before signing your contract, the vision of the company you lead must be congruent with, i.e., compatible with your own vision. Those of you who have in the past been charged with the task of implementing a vision that did not fulfill this criterion know what I’m talking about. Don’t bend. Either the company fits you, or there’s a better one waiting for you elsewhere.

2 Adaptation

If your company already has a vision, i.e., has an image (as concrete as possible) of a desirable and advantageous future, and if that vision is not “cobwebbed,” all you need to do is adapt it. Introducing revolutionary new visions tends to backfire. Ask your employees what they think the corporate vision is. Check the company’s processes to see if the vision is actually put into practice. If not, it needs to be reactivated.

3 Replacement

Your company may not even have a vision. If not, then make one. Maybe there was a vision, but thanks to a lack of attention on the part of the top Management it’s now become outdated, impractical and irrelevant. Then, again, you should make a new one. Don’t be afraid to; it’s easier than many of our fellow consultants would like you to believe. In doing so, combine top-down instructions with bottom-up discussions. Think laterally and let your fellow members of the Management participate just as much as your employees.

The key question you need to be able to answer as the CEO is: What does your company stand for – now and in the future? If your vision doesn’t extend far enough into the future, or

perhaps doesn't even have measurable goals, then it's not a vision at all; at best, it's part of your strategy. You should clearly separate the two. Vision is a necessary prerequisite for strategy. And before every employee starts following his or her own vision in day-to-day business, it's always better if you integrate those visions.

Prof. Dr. Guido Quelle
Managing Partner
Mandat Consulting Group (Mandat GmbH)
Emil-Figge-Strasse 80
D-44227 Dortmund
Germany