

THE DONALD COOPER CORPORATION

Speaking and coaching internationally on management, marketing and profitability



A management article by Donald Cooper, MBA, CSP, HoF.

The Truth About 'Vision' & 'Mission'...they're not what you think they are:
(time to read this article is about 4.5 minutes)

There's great confusion in business today about Vision and Mission. Businesses spend years and tens of thousands of dollars on consultants and 'Strategic Retreats' only to come up with a vague, airy-fairy Vision Statement that isn't worth the paper it's written on...but they proudly display it in the lobby and on their website for all to see. It usually looks something like this...

Our Vision:

- We love our customers.
- We honor the diversity of our staff.
- The planet's a great place to hang around.
- We'll be very good at what we do.
- We'll work hard and have fun.

...The Management

These typical 'aspirational' Visions state nothing that's quantifiable or measurable; no clear commitments; there is no timeline, so no sense of urgency; there's no call to specific action...and, certainly, there's no accountability. We may as well hang a picture of somebody's smiling grandmother on the wall in the lobby.

A) Our Vision: The common belief is that our Vision is our 'dream' of what we want to become some day. But, in truth, our Vision needs to be a combination of what we want to become (our dream) and the reality of what we must become to be a profitable and sustainable market leader in 3 to 5 years (our reality). And, if we're not passionate and capable to become what we must become, we have some difficult decisions to make about the future of our business...and our role in it. This is an area in which much of my Biz Coaching is done.

Our Vision will consist of 6 points on one piece of paper and it will be updated each year to keep it, and us, current and relevant. It will be clear, specific and measurable. This Vision will significantly improve clarity, commitment, effective action, urgency and accountability.

Our Vision is not our 'Statement of Purpose' or our 'Statement of Values'. We need both of those documents, but they're not our Vision or our Mission. Many businesses get that one wrong. Our 'Statement of Purpose' should be a 1-page document stating, in simple terms our 5 clear purposes:

1. Our customer purpose.
2. Our employee purpose.
3. Our investor purpose.
4. Our 'Community' purpose.
5. Our environmental purpose.

All businesses sell stuff. Great businesses make a commitment to improve the human condition in significant ways through their products and services, their customer and brand experience and their commitments, decisions and actions. So, what is your clear and significant purpose?

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Our 'Statement of Values' is a clear 1-page statement of the standards, behaviors and ethics that we commit to live by.

The purpose of our Vision is to inform, focus, challenge and inspire everyone on our team, from top to bottom, about what we commit to become in 3 to 5 years. This 'operational' Vision will be clear, specific, simple, written on one page, updated annually and understandable by all. Any Vision that doesn't do that is missing the point. Each year we'll review and update our operational Vision so it's always looking 3 to 5 years ahead.

Our Vision will talk about 'commitments'...not 'goals, targets, aims and objectives'. Most businesses talk about 'goals, targets, aims and objectives', and it's a big mistake. They have sales 'targets', profit 'objectives', customer satisfaction 'goals', and they 'aim' to do this and 'strive' to do that.

The problem is that the words 'goals, targets, aims and objectives' leave way too much wiggle room for our staff to not perform. We should replace all of those weak and wishy-washy words with one powerful word...'commitments'. We need to stop aiming and start committing. When we change our language, we change our culture. We become what we speak.

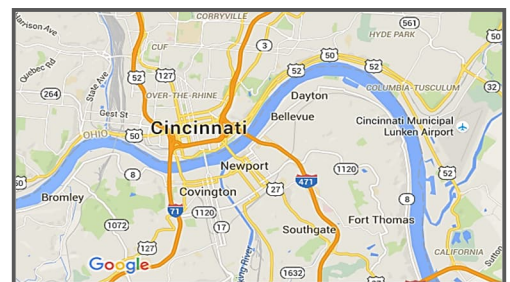
There's a huge difference between a target and a commitment. A 'target' is something we hit sometimes and miss other times...and it's OK; it's just a target.

A recent biz coaching client of mine proudly stated on their website, *"We strive to be ethical."* WOW. What the heck is that? Being 'ethical' is like being pregnant. You is, or you ain't. To paraphrase Yoda in Star Wars, *"There is no 'strive'. There is do, or not do!"*

Our clear, specific and measurable 6-point operational Vision will guide us in everything we do. It will get *"everyone singing from the same hymn sheet"*, as my Grandma used to say. That's what a Vision is for.

It will also be an effective recruitment tool when hiring key personnel. Good people want to be with a business that knows where it's going and how it will get there. And, as a practical matter, if we don't have a clear Vision for the future of our business, our business as we best understand it is our business as it just was. So, we constantly hire for the immediate past, rather than hiring people with the skills, knowledge, experience and passion required to get us where we commit to be in 3 to 5 years.

Our business Vision is like a lot like a map that shows how we'll get from 'here to there'. For example, in our daily life, if we've never been to Cincinnati, we wouldn't think of driving there without a map (forget GPS for a minute...it messes up my whole example); so why would we lead our business to somewhere we've never been before, without a map? But most businesses do just that.



For a map to be useful, we must know 2 things...where we are now and where we commit to be at some point in the future. The problem is that many businesses are in denial about where they are right now in terms of clear market positioning, value delivery, customer reputation, systems and processes, staff engagement, management effectiveness and operational efficiency. And, they have little clarity about where they commit to be in 3 to 5 years. They're just making it up as they go along...and it often ends badly.

So, how can we get from 'here to there', if we don't know where 'here' is and we have little clarity about what 'there' looks like? But, sadly, that's the reality in many businesses today.

B) Our Mission: So, what's the difference between a Vision and a Mission? Most Vision and Mission Statements look so much alike that, if you cover over their titles, nobody is sure which one is which. As we've just stated, our Vision is a clear, specific and measurable statement of what we commit to become in 3 to 5 years. If you don't like the word 'Vision', call it a '3-Year (or 5-Year) Business Commitment'. Let's not get hung up on terminology.

Our Mission, on the other hand, is a clear, specific and measurable, 6-point statement of what we commit to do this year, in each part of the business, to move towards our 3 to 5-year Vision. If we don't do specific things each year, we'll never get to our future Vision. We create a fresh, updated Mission Statement every year to keep us focused, proactive and moving forward.

C) Our Commitment to Action: Finally, from our annual Mission Statement comes our step-by-step 'Commitment to Action' for the year. This is a detailed Action Plan stating specifically what will be done, by whom, by when, at what cost, with what outcomes, measured how, rewarded how and followed up by whom at what intervals, in every part of the business.

This is the detailed and specific document that makes sure that effective implementation takes place. Businesses don't die from a single shot to the head, they die slowly but surely from a thousand uncompleted tasks. Our 'Commitment to Action' ensures that what needs to be done, gets done...on time and on budget.

So, from our 3 to 5-year Vision comes our annual Mission, which is implemented through a detailed 'Commitment to Action.' This is a living, breathing, effective and accountable process that works! We involve our Team every step of the way to get their insight. Ideas and commitment. Our employees know stuff and they hate it when we don't ask. Team involvement at every step of the process greatly improves communication and understanding, commitment, urgency, operational effectiveness and employee engagement. This is what leadership and management are all about.

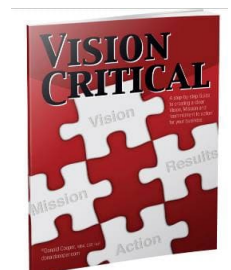
While most Vision and Mission Statements gather dust on the foyer wall, or in someone's desk drawer, this 3-step process turns our long-term commitments into specific actions that engage everyone in moving the business forward. It's simple, it's effective...and it will transform our business.

D) Cooper's '5 Pillars of Clarity': As business owners, leaders and managers, our 1st job is 'clarity'. If we at the 'top' are not clear about who we are, what we commit to become, how we'll get there, the compelling value that we commit to deliver and the extraordinary bottom line we commit to generate, who else in the business could possibly be? The answer is *'nobody'*. As business owners, leaders and managers, our 1st job is 'clarity'.

Our '5 Pillars of Clarity' are:

1. Our 'Statement of Purpose'.
2. Our 'Statement of Values'.
3. Our '3-to-5-year Vision'.
4. Our 'annual 1-year Mission'.
5. Annual, detailed and specific 'Commitment To Action'.

E) Next Steps: So, how do we get started on this transformational journey to clarity, commitment, urgency and accountability? For help in creating a clear Vision, Mission and Commitment to Action for our business (and a clear Statement of Purpose and Statement of Values), we can purchase Donald's step-by-step 40-page Vision Critical Guide as a PDF download for just \$40 at www.donaldcooper.com. This Guide, 7 years in the making, has helped 1,000s of businesses around the world.



12 important 'Vision' questions for your business and your life:

1. What do I want my **life and my family's life** to look like in 3, 5 and 10 years? Does our business model serve my 'life model'?
2. How big a **difference** do I want to make...and with whom?
3. What are the things I'd **regret dying** without ever having done? Do I have a list? It's amazing how many people who would not go to the grocery store without a list, go through life without a list.
4. What will our **industry and our market** look like in 3 to 5 years? How will our customer's needs change? How might technology change our industry? For us, will our industry be a financially and emotionally healthy place to be in 3, 5 or 10 years?
5. What will a **market leader** in our industry look like in 3 to 5 years? How big will they be? How will they operate? How might their business model be different? Will we be a disruptor ...or the disrupted?
6. How **big** do we want to be...or must we be?
7. How **good** do we want to be...or must we be?
8. How much **money** do I need or want to make?
9. How must **each part of our business change** for us to be a sustainable and profitable market leader in 3 to 5 years?
10. **How must I grow** as a leader and as a person to guide the business, or my part of it, to where it needs to be?
11. Do I have the **drive, passion and ability** to take the business, or my part of it, where it needs to go?
12. How will **I exit the business**...and when? Am I preparing the business, our Team and myself for this major change?

Grocery List	
1.	<i>Veggies</i>
2.	<i>Pasta</i>
3.	<i>Steak</i>
4.	<i>Juice</i>
5.	<i>Milk.</i>
6.	<i>Ice cream</i>

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