



Making your vision visible

I recently attended a client's divisional strategy and planning workshop. The organisation had been acquired at the start of the financial year by private equity investors, and only now were details of their plans for each business unit unfolding. The aim of the day was to map out the division's sales and marketing strategy as a precursor to a detailed business plan and budget setting. In attendance were the division's senior managers and sales persons. The meeting was chaired and facilitated by the uncompromising divisional managing director.

The MD opened the session by stating that the Board's vision was to double the turnover *and* margin of the division within two years. From the looks on the faces of the people around the table, this was a revelation to everyone. It was clear to me as an observer that he was so hypnotised by what he saw as the benefits of being a £200 million division, he hadn't realised that no one else in the room could see what he saw.

Instead he needed to take the time to find a story of this vision in a way that connected with the audience - a story that people can see. The secret of the story is to tell it from a position of complete authenticity and passion.

The Three Stonemasons¹

During the early years of the fourteenth century the foundations of a magnificent cathedral were being laid in central Europe. The clerk of works was a monk who was charged with supervising the work of all labourers and artisans. This monk decided to carry out a study into the working practices of the stonemasons. He single out three stonemasons as being representative of their profession.

He approached the first stonemason and said, "My Brother, tell me about your work".

The stonemason stopped what he was doing for a moment and replied in an exasperated voice full of anger and resentment "As you see, I sit here in front of my block of stone. It measures a metre, by half a metre, by half a metre. With every blow of my chisel, I feel as if I am chipping away a part of my life. Look, my hands are blistered, callused and hard. My face is lined and my hair is grey. This work is mind numbing and never ending, the same day in, day out. It wears me out and has broken my spirit. Where's the satisfaction in this work? I'll be dead long before this cathedral is even a quarter finished".

Deflated, the monk approached the second stonemason and again asked "Brother, tell me about your work."

"Brother", said the second stonemason in a calm and even tone, "as you can see, I sit here in front of my block of stone. It measures a metre, by half a metre, by half a metre. With every blow of my chisel, I feel as if I am carving out a life and a future. Look how I am able to shelter my family in a comfortable house, far better than that in which I grew up. My children attend school. No doubt they will look forward to even more in life than I do. All this is made possible by my work. As I give to the cathedral through my skill and dedication, the cathedral gives to me."

¹ Source: Remen R. Kitchen Table Wisdom. London. Pan, 1996.



With a spring and a smile, the monk approached the third stonemason and again asked "Brother, tell me about your work."

"Brother", replied the third stonemason with a smile and a voice full of joy, "as you can see, I sit here in front of my block of stone. It measures a metre, by half a metre, by half a metre. With every caress of my chisel, I know that I am shaping my destiny. Look, see how the beauty trapped within the form of this stone begins to emerge. Sitting here, I am celebrating not only my craft and the skills of my profession, but am contributing to everything that I value and believe in, a universe – represented by this cathedral – where each gives of his best for the benefit of all. Here at my block, I am at peace with who I am, and I am grateful that, although I will never see the completion of this great cathedral, it will still stand a thousand years from now, a beacon celebrating what is truly worthy in all of us, and a testament to the purpose for which the Almighty has put me on this earth."

The monk went away and reflected upon what he had heard. He slept more peacefully that night than he had ever done, and next day he resigned his commission as Clerk of Works and apprenticed himself to the third stonemason.