

Jim Kerr



# Story Telling For Business Growth And Long-Term Accomplishment

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As a management consultant that focuses on strategy and planning, I've had the occasion to put together some wonderful vision stories over the years. I've counseled my clients in the practice long before it was in vogue. In fact, it's amazing to me that vision stories are now considered "*the thing to do*" in business strategy work. I've been doing it for over 20 years!

If you're not already "*hip*" to the concept, a vision story replaces the tired and listless vision statements of the recent past. Written in present tense, as if the strategies have already been successfully executed and the results achieved. Vision stories explain what a business is—describing its customers, products, staff in vibrant detail. Complex concepts like "how" products and services are delivered to the marketplace are vividly styled in the story so to engage and inform.

Most vision stories are 10-20 pages in length. These stories can be presented in many forms. I've helped clients craft stories in a storyboard form much like a graphic novel. While others have asked me to organize the story into a series of articles that can be combined and published as one would produce a magazine. Some have gone so far as to mail copies of their Vision Story Magazine to each staff member via snail mail (see my latest book, The Executive Checklist for more examples).

Regardless of the form that they take, vision stories help leadership teams convey a convincing case for change and describe the target business environment towards which they want their organization to strive. They set boundaries on strategic choices and serve as a terrific screen for selecting new projects and programs. Vision stories set a tone and direction that a vision statement just can't do!

Here's what it takes to craft one for your business:

1. **Individually interview each member of the senior leadership team** and solicit their ideas regarding direction and change. Compel them to identify the biggest challenges confronting the business and work with them to identify possible solutions.
2. **Conduct group workshops with middle management and supervisory staff** and engage them in a similar discussion. Pay attention for differences between these personnel and the senior team.
3. **Solicit input from operational-level staff via surveys and informal huddles** so to gain a ground-level perspective and pulse on the business issues from the people doing the work.
4. **Synthesize the results** and identify common themes and ideas for change. The themes will become section headings of the Vision Story. The ideas will be used to cultivate the content of each section.
5. **Transform what you've identified into the story.** Be sure to engage the senior leadership in the story's evolution by having them periodically review it as it is being created.

Once the vision story is in a final shape, determine how it will be packaged and socialized. Regardless of form and function, it's good practice to present it as a published document, a video and a public forum because people learn and retain information in many different ways. By have a multi-faceted distribution of vision story content, you improve everyone in your firm's capability to understand and embrace it.

To close, vision story telling can be an innovative and essential part of your strategic planning and execution. It provides an appealing framework for setting direction and managing change and, more importantly, it presents an opportunity to convey your vision for the company in a way that can inspire and engage your staff.

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