
CHAPTER

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**The Importance of
Having BIG Vision**

Good business leaders create a vision, articulate the vision, passionately own the vision, and relentlessly drive it to completion.

—Jack Welch

Entrepreneurs come from every conceivable background: every ethnic group, economic class, education level, and physical ability; almost every age group, and both genders. Some come from generations of business owners, while others are the first in their families to ever consider starting their own business. Among the ranks of those who call themselves entrepreneurs are inventors, programmers, and artists, while others excel at building teams, selling, or devising marketing plans. It is difficult to come up with a description of what a “common” entrepreneur looks like or acts like, or to pinpoint the necessary skills or experience one must have. In fact, there is an endless list of differences among entrepreneurs, but there is one thing all entrepreneurs have in common: *Vision*.

Why is vision a universal entrepreneurial trait? It is because the purest definition of an entrepreneur is: “Someone who starts a business with a great deal of initiative and potential risk.” These individuals’ willingness (and desire) to take that initiative and assume that risk sets them apart from everyone else in the world.

Every entrepreneur has experienced this feeling. Sometimes it’s a spark that springs to life while brainstorming with a business associate; other times it’s a surge of inspiration while in the shower, or that ah-ha moment that wakes you from a sound sleep. It’s the first glimpse into the very essence of possibility—and the feeling is indescribable. Some people have even called it spiritual. The feeling takes hold the moment you sense that you’re onto something amazing, and ignites when you realize it could be something huge. That realization—that picture in

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SMALL BUSINESS, BIG VISION

your mind of future possibilities—is what vision is all about. It's something on which you can expand to take your business from a mere inkling of an idea to a full-fledged, fully operational, thriving company. That's the feeling that overtook Dan Schawbel when he first imagined what his company, Millennial Branding, could become.

Entrepreneurial Profile: Dan Schawbel of Millennial Branding, LLC

To say that Dan understands what it's like to have a big vision is quite an understatement. At 27 years old, Dan is the youngest columnist at *BusinessWeek* and has been called a “personal branding guru” by the *New York Times*. He is the managing partner of Millennial Branding and the author of the number one international best-selling career book, *Me 2.0: 4 Steps to Building Your Future* (Kaplan 2009).

Dan is a founding member of the Young Entrepreneur Council, and writes syndicated media columns that are seen by more than 1.2 million readers biweekly. He has written articles for a variety of other print and online publications including the *Wall Street Journal*, *Entrepreneur*, *BrandWeek*, Mashable, AOL Jobs, Yahoo! Shine, MediaPost, BNET, and *Advertising Age*.

As a national speaker, Dan has spoken to high-profile corporations such as IBM, CitiGroup, Time Warner, Harvard Business School, and MIT, and is exclusively represented by the Big Speak Inc. speaker's bureau. Dan helps individuals and companies with creative branding solutions.

How Dan's big vision has evolved—in his own words:

“When I first started out, I referred to myself as the ‘personal branding spokesperson for Gen-Y.’ I was careful not to use the word *expert*, because I was only writing about the subject on PersonalBrandingBlog.com at that point. After six months of hard work—and after establishing a magazine, online TV show, awards, and published articles—the magazine *Fast Company* profiled me. This led to Google

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asking me to speak at their campus and my current company, hiring me to be the first social media specialist. It proved my theories about personal branding, and thus I rebranded myself as the ‘personal branding expert for Gen-Y.’

“I eventually wrote my book, which is entitled *Me 2.0* and targeted at Gen-Y, but read by other generations. I officially launched my company in January 2010, and my vision has changed quite a bit since then. My firm is a full-service personal branding agency whose mission is to inform and educate professionals on the importance of personal branding so they can achieve career success and happiness in their own lives. The association my name has with personal branding has helped me tremendously in becoming top-of-mind in this field.”

How Dan’s unwavering vision has fueled his success:

“I can honestly say that I’ve never doubted myself when it comes to personal branding. I firmly believe that I was born to be doing what I’m doing now, which gives me confidence and alleviates any fear. I’ve been rejected and ignored so many times at this point that it doesn’t even bother me! When you’re confident about your product, you don’t worry about failure.”

The importance of having a Big Vision from the start:

“A Big Vision gives you a point on which to focus to create short-term, measurable goals. I always tell clients that you need to start with the end goal in mind if you want to take steps today to reach it. Brand yourself for the career you

want, not the job you currently have. If you can't envision the end product before you start creating it, you don't know what you will end up with. You will waste a lot of resources, time, and money if you don't know the exact product you want to develop. My greatest talent is being able to take a vision, turn it into a realistic model, and then execute on it. A big vision also gets both me and my team excited about the journey we're taking toward success and accomplishment."

Dan's advice for entrepreneurs interested in starting a company from the ground up: "Entrepreneurs who are starting a company from scratch should base their business on something they truly love. It's the only way you're going to work hard enough to reach your big vision. It's easy to give up and quit on a business that you're just doing for the money. Try to use the least amount of capital possible when you first start, because it will allow you to survive the first year. And finally, it's vital to surround yourself with people who can complement your skill set, and who you can trust."

How Dan defines success: "Success means putting yourself in a position that allows you to monetize your passion. You will be happy if you're making money doing what you love—regardless of how much money that is. True success comes when you wake up each day with the freedom and flexibility to do what you want, when you want, and how you want to do it. I feel like I'm in control of my own destiny, and that I positively change other people's lives as well."

Fuel Your Fire with Passion and Perseverance

Though an initial spark is an essential ingredient, there is much more to being a successful entrepreneur than having and maintaining that vision. The unfortunate reality is that there are plenty of people who have the “big vision moment” but who never become entrepreneurs—because they don’t have the passion needed to sustain this vision long enough to take action. There are also people who get started but who lack perseverance, and therefore falter when obstacles arise.

Turning your initial vision into a viable business has everything to do with your level of passion and ability to keep moving forward, even in the face of challenges. Without passion, it is easy to become discouraged from pursuing your plans by other priorities and self-doubt when difficulties arise. Your mind-set ultimately dictates your actions, so operating with one that is anything less than dedicated unwaveringly to your future as a business owner will cause you to struggle to take the actions necessary for your success.

Every entrepreneur in the world comes up against challenges in his or her business. No matter how carefully you plan; no matter how great you are at what you do; and no matter how hard you try to make sure everything always goes smoothly, unexpected trials *will* test your vision. The many successful entrepreneurs we’ve interviewed from a variety of industry sectors, backgrounds, and areas of the world have almost all credited their *perseverance* as the most significant element of their success. They claim that their ability to maintain their vision and a positive mind-set in the face of adversity has been the X factor that has made all the difference in their eventual achievement or failure. Their vision was big enough to carry them through the hard times, so it overshadowed any doubt that crept in along the way. In fact, these kinds of challenges are exactly what cause many entrepreneurs to thrive.

But even the most formidable entrepreneurial spirits aren't immune to discouragement and disappointment. We all struggle at times to maintain our positive mind-set and to stay true to our initial vision. Fortunately, we can use unexpected setbacks and problems as opportunities and learning experiences, and we can push through just about anything. But let's be realistic: there isn't a person on the planet who doesn't, at some time, have doubts or worries about themselves or their business. It would be unnatural to *never* feel discouraged or frustrated. The key is to keep those feelings from ruining your vision and changing your mind-set. During the worst times, we can all use some help to persevere and stay the course. To that end, we present five keys for maintaining your vision and positive mind-set:

1. **Plan your work and work your plan.** Entrepreneurs commonly become discouraged by a sense of being overwhelmed. This is particularly true within start-up companies, or those experiencing a period of sudden growth. Although the start-up process can be an exciting, energizing time—and although growth is almost always a great thing—the pressure to get so much done in a short amount of time can mount and incite feelings of frustration and worry. In companies where deadlines are the norm, these feelings might not ever ease up. In fact, regardless of company structure, we can all occasionally feel like there just isn't enough time in a day to get everything done that needs to be done. So how do you keep from losing sight of your vision when this happens?

One way to avoid, or at least reduce, the pressures that can dampen your entrepreneurial spirit is to stick to a plan as closely as possible. This isn't your business plan; rather, it's about a daily action plan that keeps you focused—not only on the details of your day, but on the big picture as well. A

great way to devise such a plan is to ask yourself what you *have* to do daily to achieve your long-term objectives. Once you've answered that question, design your daily plan around those activities, and delegate or hire others to perform as many of the other tasks as possible.

There are some significant advantages to this tactic. First, chances are good that the duties you end up tackling will be those that have to do with building and growing your business. If you're in a business that you love (which is hopefully the case), you'll enjoy the activities that contribute most to the company's success. And it doesn't really feel like work when you're doing what you love to do, even if you have a ton on your plate—and you're far less likely to become overwhelmed. Additionally, working from a plan of action gets a lot of your “to-do” items out of your head and down on paper (or on a computer screen). You know what your responsibilities are and can focus on one thing at a time without all the other issues weighing on your mind.

Of course, even when you have a plan, you'll need to deal with some unexpected “fires” that come up. When these challenges arise, the key is to handle them as quickly and efficiently as possible, with the goal of getting back on the plan as soon as you can. Your plan can be flexible, but only to the extent that it continually supports your long-term vision.

2. **Guard against negativity—from outside *and* within.** No matter how intense your initial spark was, it simply isn't possible to maintain it for long if you're deluged with negativity and cynicism. This can be a difficult challenge to overcome at times, because it is often those closest to us—friends, family, and coworkers—who are the ones feeding us negative energy. This may especially be the case if you don't come from a family or peer group of entrepreneurs; you're more likely to

receive a lot of push-back from those around you and you might even feel some resentment as you experience success.

You can take steps to effectively offset any negativity you're experiencing, either from other people or from yourself. First and foremost, it's important to think for yourself and stay focused on your business and your dreams. You should certainly be open to others' feedback and criticism, but only take actual advice from those who have done what you want to do. People with whom you discuss your business idea frequently act like experts—even though they have never successfully created their own company. Just remember that the person with whom you're talking probably isn't qualified to advise you unless he or she has accomplished what you want to accomplish. Their hearts might be in the right place, but always take what they say with a grain of salt.

Surround yourself with positive people as often and for as long as possible. Attend networking events; get to know other entrepreneurs in your community; schedule lunch with a high-energy peer to have an inspired discussion about the future. Prioritize your time so that for every hour you spend around people who are negative, you spend two hours around people who “get it” and who can feed you positive energy.

3. **Fortify your mind.** Our culture's “self-improvement movement” has been in full swing for more than 35 years now—and enough material has come out of it to keep you surrounded by positive words for the rest of your life. An Amazon search for the term *self-improvement* yields more than 60,000 books, not to mention thousands of DVDs and audio programs in MP3 format and on CD. If this isn't enough, you can find countless seminars, retreats, workshops, and camps, all designed to infuse your mind with positive energy and purpose. On top of that, you have the option to

hire a business or personal coach to keep you focused on your vision.

Instead of watching the news (or almost any TV for that matter), listen to an audio book or watch a YouTube video of inspirational speakers like Les Brown or Tony Robbins. You have an opportunity to control what goes into your mind; choose to focus on positive, uplifting, and motivating material to help you overcome obstacles more easily, to ignore the negativity of the world around you, and to keep your vision alive and strong.

4. **Embrace change.** It's been said that the only thing you can count on never changing is the fact that everything changes. You can plan for every contingency imaginable and the unexpected is still bound to arise at some point. It is simply the nature of business and life. Whether it's an economic downturn, an unexpected product shortage, or new technology that changes the face of your industry, something will happen sooner or later for which you didn't—and couldn't—plan.

Often, the difference between thriving and feeling overwhelmed in such times of change is the ability to embrace the change and make it work for you. Rather than feeling crushed when things don't go as planned, stop and think of how this new or different set of circumstances can work in your favor. You'll be surprised at what you can come up with when you approach change this way. As you'll learn in this book, some of the best companies have come about as a result of their owners' need to completely reinvent themselves when faced with unexpected circumstances. What starts out as a challenge that has the potential to cloud your vision can ignite a new spark that you never would have recognized under other circumstances. So accept that change is inevitable, embrace it, and make it work in your favor.

5. **Let history be your guide.** Every successful person—from the Wright brothers and Walt Disney, to Thomas Edison, Bill Gates, and Donald Trump—has experienced setbacks, disappointments, and internal doubt. Although all of these individuals accomplished amazing things, each of them had to overcome obstacles, just like you do. What kept them going more than anything else was a belief in their vision, an ability to focus on their goals, and most importantly, a sense of perseverance that pulled them through when they needed it most. The encouraging thing is that none of these qualities is reserved for a select few; we can *all* access them.

If you're still having trouble staying motivated, do whatever you need to do—whether it's reading an inspirational book, staring in the mirror and giving yourself a pep talk, or sitting on a rock meditating—to recapture that original feeling you had when the spark first hit and your vision was crystal clear. Remembering that moment—and, most importantly, reestablishing that frame of mind—will get you through any challenge you face. No matter what the world throws at you, you do have the power to push through. So don't let anything or anyone get between you and your *BIG Vision*!

Take a cue from entrepreneurs Siamak Taghaddos and David Hauser, who faced more than their share of challenges in building Grasshopper Group.

Entrepreneurial Profile: Siamak Taghaddos and David Hauser of Grasshopper Group

Siamak Taghaddos and David Hauser are great examples of entrepreneurs who saw a need and had the big vision necessary to fill that need—and then some. Back in 2003 there was no solution available for the kind of phone system they were looking for, so they decided to build it themselves. Today, Grasshopper—“The Entrepreneur’s Phone System”—is one of a suite of products offered by David and Siamak’s company, Grasshopper Group. To date, they have served more than 100,000 small business owners looking for a robust, economical, professional way to stay in touch wherever they go. With the buzz that Grasshopper has generated throughout the entrepreneurial community and business media, it’s clear that these professionals know a thing or two about making their vision a reality.

However, the strongest evidence of their amazing ability to accomplish a vision might just be their success in getting President Obama to declare a National Entrepreneurs Day. They created the proposal, launched a campaign, promoted it, and got it done in less than six months. As a result, President Obama announced the celebration of the United States’ first National Entrepreneurs Day on November 19, 2010. Now *that* is big vision!

How Siamak and David have pushed forward when faced with challenges: Siamak: “Even at our lowest points, neither David nor I had any doubts. We always engaged in very relaxed conversations that went something like this: ‘We’re about to face XYZ disaster if we don’t do something

about it. Here's what I'm thinking. . . .' And we'd simply make some changes or take care of the issue. Our unwavering confidence in our own ability to simply fix problems surprises me sometimes. Panicking is the worst thing a leader can do."

David: "When bootstrapping a company, you definitely run into challenges and bumps. But that is also what creates a great company, and as an entrepreneur, you must believe in yourself and your team's ability to overcome those hurdles. It is a lot like a roller coaster; many times you could jump off at the bottom and crash and burn, but entrepreneurs are the ones who say, 'No, I am going to make a change or continue pushing forward and make it happen.'"

The importance of having a Big Vision: David: "It is very important for an entrepreneur to have an idea of what 'success' looks like to them and to always be pushing toward those goals. But the most important element is their ability to communicate that vision to others so they can buy in and all work toward that shared vision. Unless everyone in the company is moving toward the same goal, the objective will never be realized. It is just as important for business owners to understand the changes along the way, and appreciate the fact that the final result might be close to but not be *exactly* what they originally had in mind."

Siamak: "A clear vision is the most important thing for an entrepreneur to have. Successful people always have an idea of where they want to be, and do everything they can to reach that place. It's the same reason why I think people go to fortune tellers—they need someone to give them that

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same vision that comes naturally to entrepreneurs. The important thing to keep in mind, however, is to never get lost in that vision. You have to be flexible enough to change and evolve it if needed as you move forward.”

Siamak’s and David’s advice for entrepreneurs interested in starting a company from the ground up:

Siamak: “Be resourceful and always remember the acronym JGSD: Just Get Sh** Done. Want to create an app? You can get it done in a few weeks. Want the President to declare a National Entrepreneurs Day? We did it in less than six months. Want to get on the cover of the *New York Times*? Start making some phone calls. Whatever you want to do, just figure it out and get it done.”

David agrees: “Stop talking, go out there and *do something*. Anyone can talk about great ideas, but entrepreneurs bring them to life and get someone to pay them for it.”

How Siamak and David define success: David: “Success for me is empowering entrepreneurs to succeed, empowering team members to do amazing things, and creating a profitable company that will be around for a long time.”

Siamak: “Achieving your goals, and being content in your personal and professional life.”