

THE ESP THEORY – by Geoff Garden

Albert Einstein worked in a Swiss government patent office. I often wonder what was going through his head as he processed paperwork for patents on better mousetraps and cuckoo clocks. His brain must have been somewhere out there in the cosmos while he worked out complex theoretical mathematics in his head.

There are two things I do know for sure about Einstein - if he had not developed a plan for his own future or had not been able to communicate his theories to other people, he would have retired as a minor Swiss civil servant and the world would have lost space travel and some great ideas for wild hairdos.

In a famous quote by Winston Churchill, "We will fight them on the beaches, we will never surrender" what if he had said, "We will probably fight them at some point, just not sure exactly where, when or how yet"? Clearly this stirring rhetoric may not have had the same impact on the morale of an embattled nation.

So how important is it to have a plan in our own business and how important is it to be able to clearly communicate it to those we work with? If we understand how fundamental good planning is to driving a successful result, why do so few of us do it well in our own business? I think it's because we have come to associate business and strategic planning with tedium and irrelevance. Many of us love the cut and thrust of the daily challenge of running our own companies. We love the pace, intensity and opportunity to get it done against all adversity. We love the badge of honor of being seen as a rugged individualist, in control of everything and able to handle any crisis. We see the process of writing a plan as drudgery to be avoided.

So how has this happened? The concept of entrepreneurs forcing themselves to write a plan makes them focus on form and forget function. What do I mean by this? Simply that in the traditional concept of strategic planning, the end point of the process is the creation of an elegant, three hundred page, professionally bound plan document that goes to a bookshelf to gather dust. This has turned us all off because these plans are static and quickly become irrelevant to what's happening in the company and the real world. They sit in book cases looking impressive - kind of like the Great Pyramid - an amazing piece of work but not much use other than as an object of awe and wonder.

So where do we go from here? You know, I have seen a lot of entrepreneurial companies without three year plans, but I haven't seen many successful entrepreneurs without a compelling and exciting vision for the future - in their heads. Unfortunately, unlike Einstein, many of us choose to keep it to ourselves. What would it be like if instead of seeing planning as drudgery, we could find a fun way to transfer the vision in our heads over to the people we work with? What if they had a chance to help make it better and what if the end result was the completion of a plan that actually supported the day to day growth of our businesses? What if it actually resulted in real action and was dynamic enough to keep up with where we were going? What if doing this allowed everyone in the company to focus on a shared vision and spend their time doing what they love to do - including us?

Sound impossible? It really isn't. The steps you need to go through are very simple:

- Identify your vision
- Communicate it to your people
- Give them a chance to improve it
- Specifically identify what has to be done to get there
- Assign responsibility for everything
- Set up a system for easy measurement of progress
- Make sure the plan is open to change as your business environment changes around you

Every successful entrepreneur I have ever met has had a strong and exciting vision for the future - the sad part however, is that we expect everyone else to be able to read our minds and get on with it. So I ask you to take a good, honest look at your own situation. Take the time think about your vision for the next three years and start working with your team towards putting an executable plan in place. It's amazing how much fun this can be since, done properly, the plan writes itself. The real payoff however, is in fact not the plan, but the creativity that is released by your whole team, the joint ownership of the tasks that are developed and the ability for everyone to focus on a shared vision.