

BY MELANIE HODGDON

## The Pros and Cons of Being a Visionary

**My clients span** the entire spectrum from visionaries to hands-on “doers.” A recent encounter with a self-proclaimed visionary led me to examine both the necessity and the danger of having visionaries as business leaders.

I was amused when I read the two definitions for “visionary” in *Merriam-Webster*:

1. One having unusual foresight and imagination.
2. One whose ideas or projects are impractical.

That is precisely the dichotomy that can lead to problems in a small construction business.

### PROS

To quote Oscar Hammerstein’s lyrics from *South Pacific*, “If you don’t have a dream, how you gonna have a dream come true?” Whether it’s captured in a formal statement or it exists exclusively in a business owner’s mind as a fuzzy mental picture or intention or even impulse, there must be some objective that a business is designed to fulfill. Without such an objective for a business, the actions associated with working will be pointless. You may make some dollars but never actually create more than a hobby that pays.

It may be helpful to come up with a formal “vision statement,” which is different from a business’s mission statement. A mission statement should be focused on the here and now: what the company does and for whom. A vision statement, however, should be inspirational and express what your ideal future with your company would look like. An example might be, “I want to be my own boss and have free time to spend with my family and enough money to provide a secure living for them.” Or it might be more like, “I want to create a profitable business that will finance my retirement years.” Or even, “I want to have the largest handyman service in the county, with a fleet of service vans and crews.”

Notice that such statements don’t talk about how to make the objectives happen; they just present a picture of what will somehow come to be. Visionaries may spend huge amounts of time figuring out what will need to be in place in order to make their vision reality. Flow charts, spreadsheets, to-do lists, and calendars may all map out pathways to reach the vision. All of this planning is exciting and necessary. But what many visionaries lack can create problems when it comes to executing the plans.

### CONS

For visionaries, it’s much more stimulating and gratifying to dream about what’s to come than it is to grapple with the day-to-day oversight and attention to detail that are required to run a business, especially during its startup years. For example, part of the plan to make a company systems-based may be to hire key people who are competent and responsible and have the required skills. So if “hire a bookkeeper” is next on the to-do list, the position may be filled, but then oversight may not occur.

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I have found that among the many endearing qualities of visionaries are high levels of optimism and trust. Who wouldn’t want a friend or family member with these qualities? Yet in terms of business, having an optimistic and trusting nature can permit incompetency and unprofessionalism to exist. I have seen a discouraging number of examples in which company owners have hired inept, inadequately trained, or even well-intentioned but unqualified bookkeepers and then simply turned them loose on the books, with disastrous consequences. As President Ronald Reagan was known to say, “Trust, but verify.” Because they often possess this large helping of trust, visionaries tend to abdicate rather than delegate. The unfortunate result is that even qualified new employees may be turned loose without a formal orientation program designed to foster their successful integration into the company; without a structured training program; and without enough oversight.

**Delegation** is all about introducing new employees into the company culture, assigning them their tasks a few at a time, reviewing the results of their efforts with them, and providing

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a system of supportive oversight that might include assigning a mentor familiar with the role or conducting regularly scheduled meetings to review work, get questions answered, and so forth.

**Abdication** occurs when new employees are tossed into a company with the assumption that they already understand the specifics of what their role demands, including the mastery of all related concepts and software; that they are prepared to meet the behavioral, procedural, and quality standards demanded by that specific company; and that they will produce excellent work that doesn't require review.

When business leaders express confidence in employees who may be secretly foundering or unaware that they are not carrying out their roles in accordance with the specific objectives of the company (such as meeting a target achieved gross margin), it becomes even more difficult for those employees to admit that they need help or are unsure about how to solve problems as they

arise. Without intending to, some extreme visionaries can end up fostering ineffective practices.

So, what's the solution? If you recognize visionary tendencies in yourself, congratulate yourself on having qualities absolutely required by a successful business. Then admit that you aren't very good at some of the detailed stuff and go find somebody with complementary skills to handle that aspect of the business. You may need to personally dig into job cost reports with that new project manager; if your tax accountant doesn't speak your language, find a consultant or fractional CFO from the remodeling industry and have them review your financials. Nobody is good at everything required to run a successful business, so putting together a team that encompasses all the necessary skills should be a high priority.

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