The Mechanics of Inventing a Vision

How Entrepreneurs Design Futures People Can Actually Follow

For most entrepreneurs, vision feels simultaneously obvious and elusive.

They have one. They can feel it. They are often swimming in a rich internal world of ideas, contingencies, possibilities, and insights. And yet, when they attempt to share that vision with others, something breaks down.

People nod but do not commit.
They agree but do not act.
They listen but do not follow.

This gap is usually misdiagnosed as a communication problem.

It isn't.

It's a *design problem*.

This paper is about the mechanics of inventing a vision in a way that allows other human beings to locate themselves inside it, assess it using their natural capacities, and decide, voluntarily, to move toward it with you.

Vision Is Not a Statement. It Is a Narrative

A business does not exist in the way a chair or a building exists.
A business is a linguistic invention.

It is a declaration that opens the possibility of future coordination.

Before there are customers, employees, or revenue, there is a narrative living inside the entrepreneur. That narrative includes identity, purpose, value creation, tradeoffs, constraints, aspirations, and beliefs about how the world works.

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This internal narrative is what I call a linguistic world.

The mistake most entrepreneurs make is assuming that because this world feels coherent to them, it exists in a usable form for others.

It does not.
A narrative is not automatically shareable.

One Narrative, Many Stories

The entrepreneur's narrative is necessarily larger, more complex, and more nuanced than anything that can be communicated in a single conversation or document.

That richness is often the entrepreneur's greatest asset.

The problem arises when the entrepreneur shares *too much of it*, or the wrong parts of it, with the wrong audience.

This is where the distinction between narrative and story becomes essential:

- **Narrative** is the full internal world of the business as understood by the founder.
- **Story** is a deliberately designed slice of that narrative, told for a specific audience, for a specific purpose.

There is one "true" narrative.
There must be many stories.

Customers do not need to know what investors care about.
Employees do not need your entire strategic map.
Partners do not need your internal operational reasoning.

They need just enough to assess whether coordinating with you makes sense for them.
Anything beyond that becomes noise.

Noise kills attraction.

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Vision Problems Masquerade as Other Problems

When vision is incomplete, everything else appears broken.

Entrepreneurs experience this not as a failure of vision, but as:

- Sales resistance
- Marketing confusion
- Hiring friction
- Misalignment
- A persistent sense that “this should be easier than it is”

They assume they need better messaging, better tactics, or better execution.

In reality, the future they are pointing toward does not yet exist in a form others can meaningfully step into.

People are not refusing your offer.
They are failing to locate themselves inside it.

The Lifecycle of Vision Invention

Vision is not discovered.
It is invented.

And invention follows a discernible lifecycle.

Through decades of working with entrepreneurs, I’ve observed that coherent visions reliably emerge through six stages. Skipping stages produces fragility. Respecting them produces power.

1. Sensing an Anomaly

Every real vision begins with a disturbance.

Entrepreneurs notice something that does not sit right. A gap. An inefficiency. A misalignment. A human frustration that existing practices do not address.

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This is not analysis yet.
It is perception.

The skill here is presence and a *deep curiosity*. Suspending judgment long enough to see what is actually happening in the lives of real people.

This is where empathy begins, not as sentiment, but as disciplined observation.

2. Immersion in the Existing System

The temptation at this stage is to jump immediately to solutions.
That is almost always a mistake.

Change is resisted not because people are foolish, but because current systems exist for reasons, some obvious, some hidden.

The entrepreneur's job here is to understand the current world so thoroughly that any proposed future feels earned rather than imposed.

Entrepreneurship is not primarily about ideas.

It is about getting human beings to change their practices.

That requires respect for the present before invention of the future.

3. Speculation Without Attachment

Only after deep immersion does meaningful speculation become possible.

At this stage, multiple possible futures should be explored lightly. Nothing is committed yet. Everything is provisional.

This is where many founders believe they "have a vision," when what they actually have is an intuition wearing confidence.

The discipline here is *not falling in love too early.*

Attachment shuts down learning.
Curiosity keeps the field open.

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4. Tentative Design

Eventually, patterns converge.

Certain choices begin to feel right, not emotionally, but structurally. Tradeoffs become clearer. The narrative starts to cohere.

Now, and only now, does design begin.

This is where tools like the VTO become valuable. Not as templates, but as constraints that force clarity.

The question shifts from “What could this be?” to “What am I willing to commit to building?”

5. Vetting the Narrative Against Reality

When you create a vision, you are inventing something that does not yet exist.

More precisely, you are inventing a future inside your interpretation of how the world works.

That interpretation is shaped by your experiences, successes, failures, temperament, education, and the slice of reality you have been exposed to. Within that interpretive world, a vision can feel coherent, compelling, and complete.

That internal coherence is necessary.

It is not sufficient.

Coherence inside your own thinking is not the same as survivability in a shared world.

There are no laws of physics governing narratives inside your head. You can unconsciously assume away constraints, overestimate willingness, misread incentives, or fill in gaps with optimism. A vision can hang together perfectly in your interpretation and still collapse when it encounters reality.

This is why vetting matters.

Vetting is not about asking people whether they like your idea. It is not about outsourcing judgment. And it is not about democratically designing the future.

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It is about testing your narrative against other people's interpretations of reality.

When you place your vision into conversation with others, you are expanding the set of realities your vision must survive.

You are listening for breakdowns.
Where does the story stop making sense?
Where do people hesitate, push back, or go quiet?
What feels unrealistic, underspecified, or internally inconsistent?

This does not mean they are right and you are wrong. But it may mean they are seeing something your current interpretation does not yet include.

Vetting strengthens vision rather than diluting it.

You are not abandoning the future you care about. You are refining it so it can exist not just in your imagination, but in a world where other human beings must choose to participate.

Over time, this is how a vision gains robustness, not by being protected from critique, but by surviving contact with multiple ways of seeing reality.

This is one of the least understood disciplines of entrepreneurship. And one of the most important.

6. Declaration

Eventually, design ends.

The entrepreneur declares: This is the future I am committing to produce.

This is not certainty.
It is orientation.

From here forward, execution replaces speculation. Refinement continues, but the narrative now has enough integrity to support coordinated action.

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Why Vision Must Be Anthropomorphic

Human beings do not have biology for assessing businesses.

We have biology for assessing other humans.

Trust, coherence, direction, integrity, and aliveness are sensed pre-cognitively. Our bodies decide before our minds explain.

This is why vision must be translated into human terms.

When people encounter a business, the question they are actually asking is:
Who is this?

Anthropomorphizing the business is not metaphorical.
It is functional.

It allows people to assess the business using capacities they already possess.

This is one reason tools like the VTO work when they work. They answer identity questions humans are always asking.

Attraction Is Not Persuasion

Leadership is an offer.
A conditional promise about a future that is better than the present.

People follow not because they are convinced, but because the future you are pointing toward takes care of them as well as you.

This is why audience selection is not optional.

You cannot be compelling to **everyone.**
Trying guarantees you resonate with no one.

Employees must share values, purpose, and competence.
Customers must share concerns and ambitions your offer actually serves.

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Narrowing is not limitation.
It is concentration.

A focused vision has gravitational pull.
A vague one dissipates.

What This Requires of the Leader

Designing a compelling vision is not a writing exercise.

It demands:

- Empathetic immersion in the lives of those you want to follow you
- Willingness to simplify without betraying essence
- Capacity to tell different stories from the same narrative
- Embodied conviction rooted in care rather than ego
- Patience to refine through contact rather than control

This is skilled work.

It is learned through practice, not slogans.

Closing

Vision is not about sounding impressive.

It is about being coherent enough that other people's biology can say yes.

When that happens, leadership stops being effortful.

Coordination becomes natural.
And people follow, not because they are pushed, but because the future you have invented is one they genuinely want to inhabit.

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