

What Science Says About Visualization

1. Visualize first. Then plan.

People typically think about goal setting in one of two ways:

Fantasize about the future irrespective of their present reality.

Think about their current situation and project forward while giving consideration to their present limitations.

According to more than 200 scientific studies on visualization, the best way to achieve real results is to utilize both types of visualization.

This tactic is known as mental contrasting. By following up your pie-in-the-sky Painted Picture with nuts-and-bolts strategic planning, you'll have both the inspiration and the gameplan necessary to reach your desired destination.

As you use mental contrasting, it's critical to do the visualization and strategic planning in different places as these two processes require completely different mindsets.

The Painted Picture is best done away from the office so it's unencumbered by your current limitations, leaving the x's and o's of your business plan for your strategic planning process.

2. Having a vision is highly correlated with company growth.

Dozens of academic studies on what successful leaders have in common all point to vision as a core component. The evidence is clear: simply having a vision has a significant impact on the outcomes of employees and the organization.

In a study of 183 entrepreneurs (average revenue: \$2.5 million), the average growth of companies with a vision was more than double than the companies without a vision.

3. Stories (told as visions of the future) change the way we think.

Another reason the Painted Picture works is that by visualizing abstract goals as pictures and videos, you're essentially turning your future into a story that will stick. Human beings are narrative creatures, and according to the research, great stories are not only easy for us to remember, but they also alter our beliefs, reduce our ability to detect inaccuracies, and evoke new emotions in us. Our brains are wired to pay attention to and remember them.

To understand this phenomenon, you don't need to look any further than your own personal experience desperately rooting for the protagonists in Jurassic World or for Elon Musk's vision to colonize Mars. In other words, telling the story of your future company through a Painted Picture is a great way to inspire your team.

4. Making the future detailed makes it easier for you and others to prioritize it and make sacrifices for it.

Most people have trouble sacrificing something in the present in return for something larger in the future. For example, in the famous "Marshmallow Test", children are offered one

marshmallow right away or two marshmallows if they can wait for 15 minutes. About 70% take the marshmallow right away. Fascinatingly, the remaining 30% were much more likely to succeed in the future, including scoring 210 points higher on average on the SAT. (Forty years later, the findings still hold true).

What separates the two groups?

It turns out that the difference lies in the availability bias. This is the cognitive bias where we make decisions based on what our mind can immediately recall.

In this case, the availability bias is manifested in the pleasure of eating marshmallows immediately. Our brain recalls that pleasure far more easily, in comparison to the relatively weak promise of future reward.

The young people who were successful hacked their brain by distracting themselves from the concrete short-term reward of eating the marshmallow. Instead, they focused on the abstract longer-term reward.

The Painted Picture operates using the same principle. By bringing the future into focus, it makes it easier for people to buy into it and sacrifice for it on a day-to-day basis.

5. Sharing a vision publicly creates internal pressure to make it a reality.

For all of the benefits of visualization, the true benefits to your business come when you share it. This is how we share our Painted Picture with our loved ones, employees, franchise partners, and other stakeholders:

At every one of our quarterly franchisee advisory council meetings, we begin by going around in a circle, reading the Painted Picture aloud. Then, we continue by discussing how our present decisions are leading us toward our ideal scenario.

The first thing that employees and visitors see when they walk into our headquarters is a large, framed version of our Painted Picture.

Every prospective employee needs to read the Painted Picture before we welcome them aboard. If it makes a job candidate's eyes light up and causes them to be excited about our future, I can be confident that I am bringing someone into the fold who will help bring the vision to life. The early Macintosh team had the same hiring filter.

Public commitment, as documented by researcher Robert Cialdini, is an incredibly effective technique to get people to follow through with what they say. In one study where potential election voters were asked to publicly share if they were voting and why, next day voter turnout increased by 25%.

6. Revisiting it daily makes you like it more.

By revisiting the Painted Picture daily, I get more and more excited and committed to it.

This phenomenon is called the mere exposure effect: the more we see something completely new, the more we develop a preference and have good feelings about it. In one study on the

mere exposure effect, simply repeatedly exposing people to fake Chinese characters for two seconds increased their liking towards those characters gradually.

No one has done a study on whether the mere exposure effect directly makes you more excited or committed to the vision, but that has been my personal experience and the mere exposure effect is one possible reason why.

How To Create A Painted Picture

Making your own Painted Picture is simple. The three steps are retreat, visualize, and ask.

First, grab a notebook and find a quiet space where you don't have any distractions from your daily life.

The next key is visualization. Transplant yourself five years into the future. See yourself looking around at your life and your business. Imagine that you're really in that place where the future HAS already happened. For example, if you have a five-year old child, imagine your child is now ten. Then, imagine yourself five years older.

Once you've transported yourself to that place, ask yourself some questions that will help you "crystal ball" the future. Here are some key questions to ask yourself:

- **What is your top-line revenue?**
- **How many people are on your team?**
- **How would your people describe the culture of your company when talking to a family member?**
- **What is the press saying about your business? Be as specific as possible: what would your local paper say about your company? What would your favorite magazine say?**
- **What do your people love about your vision and where the company is headed?**
- **How would a customer describe their experience with you? What would they say to their best friend?**
- **What accomplishment are you most proud of? What accomplishment are your people most proud of?**
- **What do you do better than anyone else on the planet?**
- **Describe your office environment in detail.**
- **Describe your service area. Who are your customers and how do they feel?**
- **There are few things more satisfying to me than receiving the Painted Pictures that other entrepreneurs have created for their own companies. In order to fully appreciate its power, I often think about the recent success of the man who operates our Toronto franchise, Paul Guy.**

If you are confident enough to state what you really want out of your business and devoted enough to pursue those goals through thick and thin, there's no telling what you can achieve.