



Dreams with Deadlines

By Alan Parr & Karen Ansbaugh

Introduction

This book is for anyone who wants to turn a dream into a reality, to rally others to a cause, and to do great work. It embodies 9 ¼ statements of belief, motivation and strategy to move from an idea into a state of production, and accept that great delivered is better than perfection anticipated. In writing this e-book, we considered the fact that we do not know what you are working on specifically, but we do know that you have an idea and that time is short. This is a brief introduction to our way of working – you can read it on a plane ride and make notes all over it. It will help.

“Given the right circumstances, from no more than dreams, determination and the liberty to try, people consistently do extraordinary things.”

[Dee Hock](#), 1999, Birth of the Chaordic Age

Thanks for reading. When you're done, feel free to share it; copy it, post it on your blog, or email it to someone who would benefit from reading it. The original is posted at <http://www.opensky.typepad.com>

And now for something completely different...

You have an idea. You don't know if it will work. But...
You have an idea. A dream...

The Senior VP issues a memo urging everyone to proactively leverage knowledge initiatives to achieve competitive advantage through informed decision making. You don't get it.

A meeting invitation pops up in your calendar for a preliminary committee meeting to identify a team of stakeholders who will own a synergy optimization forum statement of work. You don't get it, and it sounds like it will take a long, long time.

You have an idea. A dream...

On a daily basis, most people are not focused on the money, the politics, or the latest business fads; motivation comes from doing great work and being recognized for it. We believe that great ideas come not from the top, but from the edges. People who have the means to conceive an idea, rally people to the cause, and deliver tangible results quickly will be most likely to succeed. And do it again, and again.

This e-book is for you. And your idea.

Vision

Begin with the end in mind.

So what is the reality of that idea; that dream? What are you trying to do? What is the result of your effort that makes it all worthwhile? Not only do you need to know if and when you've achieved your goal, you need to compel others to help you get there. In other words, **why** should anyone care?

You have to paint a picture of how great life will be once your idea is implemented. And we do mean a picture. You have to separate out the "what" from the "why". Why is it worth the time, effort and cost to do this? Does it save money? Does it increase market share? Does it create a new market? What problem does this solve? By clearly stating why, you focus everyone's attention on what needs to be done.

I can see it from here

How can you get others to "see" your vision? A good vision is clear and compelling. Here's the result and why it's important. Most people are good at what they do and understand their day to day functions. However, often they have difficulty visualizing change or the need for it. A clear point of view helps everyone understand why a change needs to happen. It helps others become excited about the future and want to help you in the development of it. Your vision is the signpost pointing the way to the future – where you are heading and what it will take to get there.

So now you are story teller and we find that most people need you to literally draw them a picture to go with the story. By trying to draw a picture that shows your vision it will help you refine it and ready it for prime time. Just because you have committed your idea to a drawing or project charter doesn't mean it's cast in stone... it just means you have a starting point. Discoveries along the way will alter and enhance your vision. Even the final Harry Potter book has been revised from J.K. Rowling's initial rendering – but her vision for the series of fighting evil remained intact:

Rowling has known for years how the series ends; the final chapter of the as-yet-untitled closing novel was one of the earliest she wrote. But in a June interview with the British TV talk show "Richard & Judy," she revealed that she had changed her plans: One character she'd thought would die now survives, but two others die instead. That's the price, said Rowling, of fighting evil. Villains "don't target the extras, do they? They go for the main characters, or I do," she said. – Commentary by Christopher Bahn, MSNBC contributor Updated: 7:07 p.m. CT Aug 1, 2006

Start Anywhere

Avoid paralysis. Momentum only forms once you start moving.

What's the scariest thing? Babies know and years later it still freaks grownups out. It's getting up the gumption and momentum to take that first step. Hey, no matter how ready you are, you are going to stumble. So. Just. Get. Going!

You have an idea of where you want to end up. Remember the previous page – Begin with the end in mind? It's the journey from here to there that you have to figure out.

Start at the end, start in the middle. Start with a doodle. Start with a list. Just. Start.

"There are only two mistakes one can make along the road to truth; not going all the way, and not starting." – Buddha

Grab a partner, colleague, your mother, your spouse. Expound on some part of what you're imagining. Let them poke it, prod it, beat it up, tell you you're brilliant, ask you if you are speaking Swahili. Just give your ideas some air time. Listen to what you are saying. Listen to what others think you are saying. That's a start.

Learn to grow comfortable with stumbling at first. You did when you learned to walk. This is no different. There is no right place, wrong place or stupid place to start. You stumble, you adjust, you get tired, you try again, and without even realizing it you are off and running.

We reiterate it does not matter where you start. Just. Start!

If you believe in something, go for it. This is the only way to really find out. Mathematically, the naysayers are right 95% of the time, but believing you're in the 5% is what makes entrepreneurs entrepreneurs.

Guy Kawasaki, [How To Change The World](#)

Practice Authenticity

We believe that honesty is always the best policy, and that to really draw people to your cause and build a great team you should draw them in with a message that demonstrates your values. Some basic principles for crafting an authentic message are:

Have a Coherent Vision

We talked about vision earlier. We will say it again, as it is critical to the process. A clear point of view enables one to have a clear sense of what matters, and equally what doesn't matter. It provides the foundation upon which one decides what you are and are not, and where things need to go in order to get better. A coherent vision is the magnet that will pull others to you.

Tell a Meaningful Story

Sometimes seeing is believing, but authenticity is more closely aligned with faith. This seems like a paradox; how can something authentic not be demonstrable? Well, perhaps your idea is demonstrable already, but before you can put on a dog and pony show you will need to tell a story. What is your story, and why would someone believe it? The most powerful stories are anecdotal, and in the weaving of the tale they form a chain of events raising questions along the way – questions that are answered by your vision. A meaningful story will go a long way to establishing credibility with others, and to communicating the basis of your vision.

Originally You

While we believe that there is nothing new under the sun, originality doesn't necessarily mean "new". It means "you". Is Coca-cola[®] the only cola drink on the market? No, but it is the real thing and certainly is not Pepsi[®]. Could you buy music before Virgin Records came along? Sure, but Virgin offers a highly original (and irreverent) experience. Authenticity requires a very personal perspective, unlike anyone or anything else. That can only come from within.

Practicing authenticity means telling it like it is – simple advice, rarely followed. Authenticity allows for a shift in perception, letting others engage and share what your cause has to offer, and to contribute in the most meaningful way – honestly.

Deep Generalists Apply Within

For a limited number of resources, generalists work best, and are always open to new approaches.

Our experience is that a small core team works best – we focus our teams on being better, not bigger. A team that can collaborate, communicate efficiently, share insights, and overlap as needed will outperform a larger team. Essentially, we recruit Deep Generalists for the core team and bring in Specialists from the outside as and when necessary. There are many reasons for doing this:

- ✦ Deep Generalists usually have several areas of expertise, and have experienced different industries, different mediums. The cross-pollination of experiences leads to richer, more innovative ideas. They are able to bring insights from many different perspectives and recognize patterns of behavior that form the basis of problem identification and solution.
- ✦ Experimentation is usually a part of their background. Deep Generalists are willing to throw out preconceived notions and consider new approaches, new solutions. Experimentation is also akin to prototyping, which is another tenet of this manifesto.
- ✦ Deep Generalists are highly empathetic; they can stand in the shoes of others. This last skill not only allows the Generalist to have keen insights about the world around them but is at the heart of why they can branch out into other areas, other skills and domain knowledge. Empathy also leads to building better teams; relating to other members of the core team as well as to external partners is critical.

Deep Generalists are highly prolific, creative people with an acute sense of curiosity and optimism. Recruit them for your team.

Knowing and Doing Are One And The Same

Question: What's the best way to identify and operationalize a new concept – by thinking about it first or jumping in and trying something?

Answer: Do both.

Is it faster to get to production by prototyping a new concept? Maybe, but the product will suffer for lack of design thinking. Will a better product be created through in-depth analysis and design of a new concept? Maybe, but it is highly inefficient when speed to market is critical. The one sure thing to get a great product to market fast is take a loose concept and shape it by bombarding a series of quickly developed prototypes with critical analysis. In essence, the proverbial "do both". Learning by doing is the key to embracing the unknown.

"Test fast, fail fast, adjust fast." - Tom Peters

Thinking: Imagining the Unknown

To create a new concept from scratch involves two main ingredients. Firstly, a unique perspective and secondly, having two little ideas. A large part of imagining the unknown involves putting yourself in a different position to view the problem at hand. Having a new perspective (physically and otherwise) leads to new ways of viewing old problems and solutions. As Einstein said "to raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old questions from a new angle, requires creative imagination and marks real advance." Perhaps you are faced with an existing, known problem. Yet without a different perspective you will create an existing, known solution. This is not mindless repetition, but it is close. You will have missed the heart of the matter, creating the unknown. So, frame your problem in an original way – get a unique perspective – and you can then work on an original solution. What distinguished the Wright Brothers from other aviation pioneers of their era? They focused on what it would take to stay aloft, not simply what it would take to get airborne. Other aviators tinkered with wings and engines. The Wright Brothers focused on creating a stable airplane by defining the critical issues to be balance and control.

With your new perspective, will you be struck down with a lightning bolt from the blue? Most likely not. Instead of waiting for divine inspiration, jot down as many ideas as you can. Time yourself if needs be – it's a great motivator, and it can remind you of the need for speed (to market). Try to come up with 3 ideas in a minute, or 10 in 5 minutes. Great ideas are usually the byproduct of two little ideas. George Polya, a Hungarian mathematician said, "Discovery is almost never a single idea. Always look for new related problems after solving the initial problem." Ideation is a process. But all ideas come from inside - from memory. To have more and better ideas, read voraciously, talk with interesting people, and have more and better experiences.

Doing: Creating the Unknown

For human beings, the most natural form of learning is through making mistakes. When you are creating the unknown, the best way to visualize new concepts is to make them – iteratively making and remaking models, and in so doing – making mistakes faster. Jonathan Ive, Apple designer, said "One of the hallmarks of the team I think is this sense of looking to be wrong...It's about being excited to be wrong because then you've discovered something new." And so, as a rough rule of thumb, when your challenge is to create value or seize an emerging opportunity, the solution is to perform like a design team: work iteratively, build a prototype, elicit feedback, refine and repeat. Give yourself a chance to uncover problems and fix them in real time, as the process unfolds. Prototyping gives us a means of understanding the obstacles, whether they are inherent in the functional design, or in the behavioral usage, or in the customer's expectations. It also provides a means of exploration, of seeing the future, and making it part of our present.

Knowing the name of something and knowing something are two very different things. First-hand knowledge is better than theory and eliminates a lot of the guesswork when operationalizing a new concept. For example, Richard Feynman recounted a story from his childhood on how he became interested in science:

When I was still pretty young--I don't know how old exactly--I had a ball in a wagon I was pulling, and I noticed something, so I ran up to my father to say that "When I pull the wagon, the ball runs to the back, and when I am running with the wagon and stop, the ball runs to the front. Why?" He said, "That, nobody knows." He said, "It's very general, though, it happens all the time to anything; anything that is moving tends to keep moving; anything standing still tries to maintain that condition. If you look close you will see the ball does not run to the back of the wagon where you start from standing still. It moves forward a bit too, but not as fast as the wagon. The back of the wagon catches up with the ball, which has trouble getting started moving. It's called inertia, that principle." I did run back to check, and sure enough, the ball didn't go backwards. He put the difference between what we know and what we call it very distinctly.

You don't even need to physically create something to have first-hand knowledge of it. Conduct thought experiments - play mind games - to gain experience with new concepts. Picture it in your mind. Turn it over, take it apart, test it. In order to picture your concept at that level of detail you will develop a full understanding of it. Then you will have improved your odds and will be better prepared to succeed at whatever you attempt.

Think Globally, Implement Locally

Consider the broader picture when making decisions that will affect others; allow for local decision-making.

Thinking globally, implementing locally, if you'll allow a slight spin, applies to projects as well as recycling and the economy. Why do we need to do this on a project? Consider the Butterfly Effect:

The flapping of a single butterfly's wing today produces a tiny change in the state of the atmosphere. Over a period of time, what the atmosphere actually does diverges from what it would have done. So, in a month's time, a tornado that would have devastated the Indonesian coast doesn't happen. Or maybe one that wasn't going to happen does. – Ian Stewart, [Does God Play Dice? The Mathematics of Chaos](#)

We have found that when the global implications of any project are not considered -what you think is a tiny change is devastating some where else in the organization. In fact, thinking locally will generally tank your project. Take this example of a very public and expensive failure:

September 23, 1999 posted on the Mars Polar Lander website
Mars Climate Orbiter is believed to be lost due to a suspected navigation error. Early this morning at about 2 a.m. Pacific Daylight Time the orbiter fired its main engine to go into orbit around the planet. All the information coming from the spacecraft leading up to that point looked normal. The engine burn began as planned five minutes before the spacecraft passed behind the planet as seen from Earth. Flight controllers did not detect a signal when the spacecraft was expected to come out from behind the planet. <http://mars.jpl.nasa.gov/msp98/orbiter/now.html>

And the reasons for failure:

Nov. 10, 1999 excerpt from news release MARS CLIMATE ORBITER FAILURE BOARD RELEASES REPORT:
...The failure board's first report identifies eight contributing factors that led directly or indirectly to the loss of the spacecraft. These contributing causes include inadequate consideration of the entire mission and its post-launch operation as a total system, inconsistent communications and training within the project, and lack of complete end-to-end verification of navigation software and related computer models.

"The 'root cause' of the loss of the spacecraft was the failed translation of English units into metric units in a segment of ground-based, navigation-related mission software, as NASA has previously announced," said Arthur Stephenson, chairman of the Mars Climate Orbiter Mission Failure Investigation Board. "The failure review board has identified other significant factors that allowed this error to be born, and then let it linger and propagate to the point where it

resulted in a major error in our understanding of the spacecraft's path as it approached Mars.
<http://mars.jpl.nasa.gov/msp98/news/mco991110.html>

To be successful you have to get out of your silo. You have to understand the end to end, enterprise level implications of what you are attempting to achieve. Share what you are doing with other groups. In our experience, groups know their processes. Ask if they see impacts. Often you will be steered to critical areas you didn't even know existed. Ask for their partnership. Let them determine how to incorporate needed changes into their process. This approach has allowed us to avoid costly mistakes, garnered us tremendous support and greatly contributed to successful implementations.

Optimism Required (Realism Optional)

Note to Self: All great work started from nothing.

Launching into developing a new concept requires a good deal of faith. You have to put a lot of effort into something like this strictly on the idea of belief because, if you are creating the unknown, you will not know enough to justify doing it otherwise. But self belief is a good thing. For a start, when little else seems within your grasp at the outset, belief is entirely within your control.

"I think I did pretty well, considering I started out with nothing but a bunch of blank paper." – Steve Martin

Self belief stems from within; from memory. While never having attempted your latest venture before, maybe you've done something like it. You might have to squint to see it, but it could be there. Applying analogies is a good way of applying learned skills and behaviors to a new problem. Typically analogies shift from the world of the familiar (your knowledge base) to the new and unfamiliar, taking ideas and experiences in one context and transferring them to another. Analogies can suggest solutions to new problems all by themselves.

Perhaps though you are encountering an altogether new experience - for most creative people, our ideas start with an empty page, a cocktail napkin, a blank canvas. Some people find this daunting; faced with having to start something new, they fall into paralysis. Where to start? Creativity is partly about being open (mindful) to what is happening to you, around you, at all times. But mostly it's about focus and lots of hard work. What was that quote about inspiration and perspiration? That's the right stuff. The blank canvas, the empty page, is a good place to be. It means first and foremost, that you have an opportunity to create something, and that's valuable in and of itself. Now you can concentrate on the perspiration and improve your odds of success. Inspiration can take care of itself. Believe it. Do it.

Give Me Duct Tape, Not Red Tape

Bureaucracy is fine for bureaucrats. Focus on delivery; communicate in the best ways possible without hurting your deadline.

“The idea is not the design. Only an embodiment of an idea is design... Every time ideas are debated verbally, an organization wastes resources.” – Chris Conley, Designer.

Prototyping works. Whether you’re creating a drawing, a model, software, or a movie about your product, being able to show and tell is very important. Prototypes allow everyone to engage, test and improve your idea. The idea becomes tangible, even when the prototypes are built quickly, inelegantly duct taped, and will be discarded later. The goal isn’t necessarily to produce something close to the final product, but to elicit feedback, find improvements, and to share progress with others.

“Quick prototyping is about acting before you’ve got answers, about taking chances, stumbling a little, but then making things right.” Tom Kelley, IDEO, [The Art of Innovation](#)

Demonstrating your idea to your team, your management, your client through prototypes provides everyone an intuitive feel for the direction you’re heading. Direct insight is far better than reading a lengthy report or a sound bite PowerPoint presentation. The prototype tells the story, and in so doing not only is your idea evaluated but also your vision can be refined. Rapid prototyping communicates in a tangible way, and can ultimately make your vision clearer and more powerful.

We believe wholeheartedly in one of the principles Kelly Johnson put together for Lockheed Martin’s Skunkworks: minimize the number of required reports but record important information and metrics thoroughly. Avoid unnecessary red tape, and select the key areas that require good documentation – vision, timeline, key decisions, issues, costs, whatever is appropriate. But prototype to learn, and as you iterate you will get closer to achieving your goal and you will always have something to show for your efforts other than a dusty pile of reports.

Real Artists Ship

Get the product out the door. Get your name on it. Get feedback.

REAL ARTISTS SHIP. A three-word koan* that Steve Jobs wrote on an easel in January 1983, when the release of Apple's first Mac was months past deadline. Steve was reminding his team that delivering working products on time is as important as innovation and great design (both of which Apple is famous for).

Your idea, your creation – your art – does not exist if it is not out there, in the market and available for consumption. While the greatest artists such as Da Vinci and Van Gogh had exceptional ideas, they are known for the works that they *produced*. That is the single validating step for an artist.

You have to ship because:

- ✦ With a high level of uncertainty about what your customers want, the best way to get information is to ship your product (or at least a prototype/first release of your idea) and see what happens.
- ✦ The best advertising is people who are familiar with your product or service. The more people that have your product, the greater chance that they will talk to someone that doesn't yet own it.
- ✦ All the great design decisions, all the subtleties, long hours, and frustration that went towards turning your dream into reality needs a chance to become part of people's lives.

Work to bring your dream into reality *on time* – you have a finite amount of time to make an impression and establish a standard. Your first product may not be your best product, but the first acceptable product (with good marketing) will win. Once you have shipped, then and only then do you stand a chance of “making a dent in the universe”, just like Steve Jobs' team. Ship it.

*koan (n.) A puzzling, often paradoxical statement or story, used in Zen Buddhism as an aid to meditation and a means of gaining spiritual awakening. Zen koans are riddles used by masters to confuse and disorient students as a means of awakening.

Don't Seek Perfection when Great Will Do.

"Finality is death. Perfection is finality. Nothing is perfect. There are lumps in it." – James Stephens

Learn to live with great. All seeking perfection gets you are missed deadlines and missed opportunities to do the next great thing.

Following the advice in the pages above, we are shipping [Dreams with Deadlines](#), lumps and all. Let us know what you think.

Useful Links

Inspiration - *People, companies and things that inspire us.*

Richard Branson & the Virgin companies -- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Branson

Daniel Pink, "A Whole New Mind" -- <http://www.danpink.com/>

Steve Jobs & Apple -- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve_Jobs

IDEO -- <http://www.ideo.com/>

John Maeda, "Simplicity" -- <http://weblogs.media.mit.edu/SIMPLICITY/>

Fast Company magazine -- <http://www.fastcompany.com/homepage/index.html>

Gurus Who Blog - *As Tom Peters would say, "Read These People!"*

Tom Peters -- <http://www.tompeters.com/>

Seth Godin -- <http://sethgodin.typepad.com/>

Guy Kawasaki -- <http://blog.guykawasaki.com/>

Bruce Nussbaum -- <http://www.businessweek.com/innovate/NussbaumOnDesign/>

Anita Roddick -- <http://www.anitaroddick.com/>

About The Authors

Alan Parr and Karen Ansbaugh are cofounders of the OpenSky Consortium. They approach management consulting with creativity, elegant execution and wicked senses of humor. While both have management consulting backgrounds, they are the antithesis of McKinsey and Bain, running a “management design development consultancy group” (try saying it fast).



OpenSky is a consortium of independent consultants. While traditional consulting companies tend to pour lots of hours into statistical data analysis in order to arrive at a strategy, at OpenSky we believe that our clients and their customers have better ideas of what they need. Our focus is on turning their dreams with deadlines into realities; prototyping and field-testing ideas to bring them to life quickly. And on time.

Visit our blog site at <http://opensky.typepad.com>.

Info

Copyright

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/3.0/us/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

What You Can Do

You are given unlimited right to print this e-book and to distribute it electronically (via email, your blog or website, or other means). You can take individual pages from this document, you can hang them in your cubicle, you can transcribe the authors' words onto greetings cards or tattoos and impress everyone. You may not alter the document in any way though, and you may not charge for it. But we want you to share it with those who will benefit from reading it.

Born On Date

This document was created on 11 May 2007 and is based on information available at that time. To check for updates, please click here to visit <http://opensky.typepad.com>.