

The Importance of Having a Dream

I always ask people what their dream is. Why is this important? It's simple: Launching and growing a business is an art and requires a balance between tactical and strategic thinking.

Before continuing I want to make sure you understand what I mean by having a dream. First, it's important not to confuse having a dream with having a goal or company objective. Company goals and objectives are extremely important, but what I am referring to is overlaying all of that with why you started a business in the first place. The dream is personal, it's the reason you stepped away from a job and launched a business. Here's how I want you to think about your dream: if you have had total success with your business and you have a successful liquidity event and become financially free, your dream is what you are going to do with these financial resources and your life. If you structure your personal dream correctly as well as your company's ultimate goals and objectives, the resulting successful liquidity event will result in you achieving your dream.

If you don't have a dream in place, you can't work to achieve it. When you have a dream, then you have something to focus on and work toward, which will guide and motivate every decision you make. The question about a dream is actually about being able to develop a tactical business approach that will lead you to your strategic objective. Having a dream and articulating it are the first steps toward achieving it.

When we launched CST, my partner, Bobby Bradley, and I sat down and discussed *why* we were going to start a company and *what* we wanted the outcome to be. During our conversation, we realized we needed to separate the company's ultimate objective from the outcomes we desired personally. We came to the conclusion that achieving the former would ultimately result in reaching our personal dreams. I asked Bobby, who grew up in a primarily African American neighborhood in North Huntsville, Alabama, "What's your dream?"

She thought about it for a minute and said, "If we can get the company's value to a significant level where we could sell it and become financially free, I'd like to, somehow, give back to my people." She was referring to the young people who were growing up in her childhood neighborhood.

That dream motivated her all the way to our successful liquidity event. Why? Because it was bigger than her. Focusing on working hard so you can give back and help others can diminish your career stress and ease the challenges associated with growing a company. Having a personal dream is a critical success principle. The applicable pearl here is:

"Having a dream is what keeps you alive.
Overcoming the challenges makes life worth living."
– MARY TYLER MOORE

So, as you are thinking about launching your business and continuing to grow it, take some time to ask yourself: "What would I do if I were financially free? What's my dream?"

Dream-building Sessions

What I call "dream-building sessions" provide the perfect opportunity to develop an understanding of both your own personal dream and those of

the people around you. As with the human element strategy, which I will discuss next, there is a priceless benefit to holding these sessions regularly. And it's easy to do.

It starts with having a dream yourself before holding a session with someone else, of course. But, as a business leader, there will be numerous opportunities to hold dream-building sessions. Opportunities can be as simple or basic as asking a recruit what their dream is during an interview (which I discuss in greater detail in the section about hiring in Part Three) or as complicated as having a facilitator at your annual leadership team off-site event lead a session in which each team member shares their dream with their colleagues.

As a business leader, the most effective and valuable dream-building session is a one-on-one lunch or coffee break with an emerging employee. Inviting someone like that for a private discussion creates in them a feeling of gratitude and the person is open to your message. The message here is that this interchange reinforces this employee's understanding that the company's culture is about helping people, especially employees, who will ultimately sustain the positive work environment. So, you simply ask your guest, "What's your dream?" That question changes the essences of the meeting—it's about the other person, and you are also practicing the human element strategy. If they start articulating their career objectives you have to stop them and explain that you are asking them what they would do after having a very successful career and they find themselves financially free.

The valuable outcome from these sessions is subtle. On the surface it creates an interesting dialog and helps the individual get a grip on what they want out of life. But the underlying value is in the fact that the individual (subconsciously or consciously) realizes that you care about them, which draws them to you. A huge positive outcome is that it can secure your workforce, who will tell everyone they know what a great place your company is to work.

Another great opportunity for a dream-building session is at one of your weekly leadership team staff meetings. Normally staff meetings are

operational in nature. During our successful growth periods at CST, we structured one of each month's four weekly staff meetings to purposely have it strategically focused. We would start by having our CFO, Kevin Webber, brief us on how close we were at that point to meeting our annual revenue goals. We would then go around the room asking the team members individually to revisit their dreams with us, which led to a lively discussion resulting in buy-in from the team on why we were growing our company. It's important to hold these dream session staff meetings in the virtual environment we've mentioned earlier. These virtual meetings are structured similarly to in-person ones, with the CFO opening the meeting with the financial status. Then, assuming the virtual application provides screenshots of the attendees, you replicate the dream-building strategy and ask the attendees one-by-one to share their dream.

So, the importance of dream-building sessions is multifaceted. Through them, you can vet people based on their answer. In a group it has the effect of bringing a team together and ultimately it has a motivating effect and creates an opportunity to revisit why you're doing what you do. However, there could be a negative side to this dream-building session concept that can be turned into a positive. Sometimes a smart technology savvy individual can leak their way onto a leadership team, and they can sometimes be all about *their* knowledge and *their* importance and think this dream stuff is a bunch of hoopla. They suffer from having what we coined "ingrown eyeballs"—they only care about what the company can do for them.

In our experience, these people were purged or left the company on their own because they just couldn't stand the positive culture. That was the positive outcome I mentioned earlier; the dream session helped identify problem people before they became a problem. And because we had our personal dreams in place and were clear about them, we didn't let anyone slow us down or steal our dream.

On a personal note, my dream has changed over time even though it shares the theme of wanting to help people. My goal at CST was to help

as many people as I could to achieve and realize their own dreams. As it became obvious that CST was having success and we would reach our liquidity objective, my dream migrated to something closer to my partner's, which was wanting to give back. In my case, though, it was to share with young business owners and entrepreneurs what my partner and I had learned about growing and building a successful technology company. That is my dream even today and that is what I hope to accomplish with this book and my consulting activity.