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## The Importance of Vision, from 'Belonging', (extract) – Owen Eastwood, (2021) p 144 - 157

“If it was really good... what would it be like? There comes the **vision**... Now, it’s just about staying connected to it. That is where the coach comes in. We keep you connected to the **vision** until it becomes true and lives...” - Pete Carroll

“Mandela, Churchill, Ghandi, Martin Luther King all understood that a shared **vision** changes behaviour. They were able to identify a collective frustration – the gap between current reality and where we want to be. From this came a **vision** to answer that frustration. We change **vision**, we change behaviour” – Eric Blondeau

We are biologically and psychologically a **vision**-driven species... our ancestors deeply understood this power of imagination, of visioning, of creating mental models to guide us. They were masters at ensuring that everyone was aligned as they moved towards their shared **vision**.

**Visioning** is another essential ingredient in our super strength of creating strong teams. However, what was intuitive to our ancestors has become weakened over time by tasks disconnected from meaning. This is demonstrated by how many leaders start with a strategy rather than working *from purpose to vision to mission and then to a plan*... The people still have this primal need for a **vision**, but are too often let down by those charged to guide them. Whatever the diversity within a team, what they most tangibly share is the future they are about to embark on together.

The science is catching up with our ancestors. We now better understand our reliance on ‘seeing’ to understand the world around us. *Where our images go, our energy follows.*

The part of the human brain responsible for processing visual information is the largest, covering more than 50% of its surface. **Vision** gives us the richest detail to assess threats and opportunities and, as a species, our eyesight is second only to birds of prey.

... The definition of ‘**vision**’ encompasses both the physical act of seeing, and a thought formed by the imagination or something ‘seen’ in a dream. In both cases, *our brains give equal weight to what we see before us and what we imagine.*

Our ability to **imagine** is central to the human condition. When we **vision**, either seeing or imagining, and each time we consistently return to the vision, we are hardwiring neural pathways. Put another way, we are creating forward memories. As science writer David Hamilton shared:



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*Researchers at Harvard University, led by Alvaro Pascual-Leone, compared the brains of people playing a sequence of notes on a piano with the brains of people **imagining** playing the notes. The region of the brain connected to the finger muscles was found to have changed to the same degree in both groups of people, regardless of whether they struck the keys physically or mentally.*

Elite performers have long taken advantage of this insight and mentally rehearsed their performances through **visualisation**.

**Visualisation** strengthens, with repetition, the myelin insulation of neural pathways that performers can lock into during their actual performance. The more insulation around these neural pathways, the faster the information transmits in real time between brain and muscles, to the point of becoming automatic.

... Performance psychologist Michael Gervais is highly skilled in teaching visualisation to elite performers:

“The visualisation process needs to be as real as possible to fire the system. Not just vision but all the senses if possible. It requires a disciplined approach of embodying and experiencing lifelike images.”

Visioning a goal activates our (feel-good) dopamine system that sustains our motivation and focus.

The more emotional weight attached to a vision, the stronger these neural pathways will be. Our ancestors intuitively understood that visioning has to be tied to a tribe's Us story. This is where the necessary emotional heft came from.

It is paradoxical that elite individual performers are so proficient at visualisation, yet it is rare to find teams that are similarly skilled and practiced at doing this collectively with comparable intent or depth. Therein lies a lost opportunity for aligning everyone in pursuit of a desired outcome.

All too often in teams, **visioning** is replaced by the imposition of abstract words, strategy or a linear outcome. None of which can be easily **visualisable**. This invites misalignment and diluted motivation.

The vision must be shared by the people. It is, after all, the path the tribe will travel together, and ultimately form their collective legacy. Our better leaders today, as with our ancestors in the past, stay with the visioning until it is full and the mental pictures clear and rich in detail. They co-create the vision with their team. They sketch a picture but then everyone together colours it in.

