

Narrative Visions

from "Facilitative Leadership" by Interaction Associates

Tonight's homework assignment is to write a narrative vision. This isn't your generic corporate vision, like "Be the best provider of service in our industry." This isn't even the inspirational "I want to put a ding in the universe," Steve Jobs-type of vision. A narrative vision is something much more personal, sensory, and visual. It appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos alike. It touches the sublime.

Begin by placing yourself in the right mindset. Write a brief mission statement of your organization or team. This could be its task, purpose, or reason for being. Next, list the values reflected in the work. What are the beliefs about what is important or desired by the organization or team? Then, brainstorm a list of five to seven images of what success would look like.

Finally, in 100 words or less, write the narrative from the perspective of someone experiencing it. What do they see? Hear? Smell? Touch? How do they engage in the experience? Are there other people there? How do they interact? How does the protagonist feel during the experience? Afterwards?

Here's an example of a narrative vision, written by a meeting facilitator:

"The moment you enter the room, you know this meeting will be different. People are talking and smiling and laughing in small groups, standing together, or sitting around movable tables loaded with markers, paper, tablets, and other creative tools. Easels and movable walls hold the content of meeting, and despite the flood of information, the flow and progression of the ideas are easy to grasp. With a glance, you understand the purpose and process of the meeting. You decide to explore the content on the boards and listen in for a while.

"After exploring on your own, the host warmly welcomes you and orients you to the social norms of the group. You agree to the principles of the meeting, inwardly relieved that you can engage in a way perfectly attuned to your own temperament and preferences.

"You head over to a group of four people writing on a large whiteboard. After reading their ideas and listening briefly, someone asks your opinion on an issue. You thoughtfully share your perspective. The others acknowledge and build on what you say. You have seamlessly integrated into their discussion. Their supportive, accepting attitude is in keeping with the principles you agreed to, and you're happy to reflect that attitude back to them.

"When the meeting ends, you feel refreshed and deeply engaged with the outcomes. Much of the work the group laid out for itself was accomplished during the meeting. You are grateful for the experience and for the open collaboration you shared with your colleagues. You are satisfied by your own contribution. As you reflect on the day, you decide that there was no better way you could have spent your time. You look forward to tomorrow."