

## Free your minds, and the rest will follow

We are always amazed at the insights we receive at every stage of the Vista Brand Roadmap, but sometimes that amazement comes in the form of total unexpected surprise. We never expected some of the twists and turns that we have seen when we asked the leadership teams of our growth clients to dream.

Step 2 of the Roadmap is about coming up with a ridiculous, audacious dream of what you really want to be. It's about throwing away all preconceived notions of what's holding you back, what you can and cannot do, and what your strengths and weaknesses might be. Some people are naturally good at imagining the future. Others are not so good at it. However, when you make this requirement of a leadership team, the dynamic is completely different, and, in the case of Emids, LUMA Institute, and Coca-Cola, totally unexpected.

Leadership teams, and, more specifically, established brands, bring with them everything that's in the DNA of the company. The longer the company has been around, the deeper the DNA is entrenched, and the harder it is to bring about change. In all three of these cases, the DNA of the organization was totally different, and each took a completely different approach to get to the point of dreaming big.

### Emids

Emids is based in India, and their US headquarters is in Nashville, a US healthcare technology hub. The CEO of Emids, Saurabh Sinha, and his team were filled with engineers and Project Managers and developers, most of whom were from India. Their view of tech companies was pure Silicon Valley, which they viewed as very sexy and exciting; however, when it came to thinking and dreaming audaciously, they just could not get there. Their left brain culture, mentality, and corporate DNA had limited their everyday thinking.

We tried a few creative exercises, but that only led to the entire team questioning the exercises, and the steps, in order to reengineer the exercise. We remembered that you have to break routines to get the mind to think differently. We were trying to think creatively in their corporate boardroom. Walking into the boardroom for the millionth time, they immediately went into problem solving mode. So, we said, "Let's go for a walk!"

Physical movement unlocks the mind, and the leader, Saurabh, had maintained a laid back approach in order to let the team step up to the plate. He wanted everyone else to step up instead of him having to lead everywhere. Halfway through, he finally interjected and set the example of free thinking, but not an alpha voice. Rather, his leadership sent the clear signal to the team that they could think - and speak! - freely. Moving off site and changing the dynamic of the team made all the difference in their ability to think big and audacious.

### LUMA

On the opposite end of the spectrum from Emids is LUMA. The LUMA Institute's business is teaching innovation, so Step 2 was easy. With half a dozen Secretariat-like runners who just wanted to run in the room, there was no need for a warm up or exercises to free their thinking or a change of venue. In fact, the LUMA team was so well disciplined that shifting gears into Step 5 came early. "Let's see if we can edit/refine the big ideas." We completed Step 2 in half the time as normal.

They got The Roadmap in a second, clearly understood. They knew they would be shifting gears and moving forward. They used the process to bring light to their issues, and were able to glide between the steps, like a stream, rather than a canal with locks. Most people need programming and guidance to shift their thinking. The LUMA institute's DNA was such that they did not need require much guidance at all.

### **Coca-Cola**

This engagement with Coca-Cola was the very first time the Vista Brand Roadmap as a process had actually been deployed. Steve Beshara was learning as he facilitated the engagement, and he did not have the benefit of knowing David Kelly at IDEO and their (now world famous) processes. It was from this engagement with Coke that Steve created the "rules of engagement" that are now an integral part of The Roadmap.

Any organization that's more than 100 years old may be saddled with politics and sacred cows. At Coca-Cola, there were alpha voices in the group who did not know how to - or understand that they must - suspend judgement in order for free thought to flourish and allow the team to dream those big, audacious goals. The naysayers were sophisticated: "We've tried that before and it does not work." How can anyone junior to that person argue with such a statement? Unfortunately, those types of statements kill ideation and inspiration for everyone else.

Additionally, the executives in Atlanta had certain "sacred cows", while the distribution network of bottlers had different sacred cows. The bottlers wanted the Atlanta leadership to get rid of sacred cows and vice versa. The result was a lot of egos and political battles. It was at this point that "tough love" became necessary. "I had to step on them a little, changing the dynamic of the session," Steve Beshara recalls.

Every corporate culture is very unique, and requires different handling. The culture and DNA of any organization is reflected in the 'social system' that is naturally or intentionally engineered by senior leadership. Success in Step 2 of the Vista Brand Roadmap requires the team to set aside that entire social system, including politics, sacred cows, and individual egos. **Coke** was such a politically wired social system that they almost couldn't unplug their political wiring to do Step 2. **Emids** lacked creativity in that they did not know how to free their minds. They have the creative muscle, but that simply had never used it before. **Luma** was like trying to take IDEO through an IDEO process.

In any case, what it takes to get the team thinking is completely different, but once they start telling stories of futurecasting, they can't stop.