

! Vision and the Smell of Brownies

As discussed in other installments, having a vision is critical to giving a good idea a good start in life; it gives you a goal, an end point, a way by which to measure success. But, how do you actually move toward that vision, especially if it's a path you've never before taken?

When you have a vision, you *know* everything you need in order to succeed (more about knowing in the next installment!). You might not be able to exactly, perfectly, articulately describe it, or at least not in a way that is yet easy for others to understand... but it's oh so clear in your mind. Creating, articulating, and getting to a vision is not a linear process--it's more like a zig-zag. You take steps, but they may not lead you directly there. You have to wander a little bit, always moving closer and closer to the vision.

So what does that have to do with brownies, you ask?

It's a chilly fall day, and you come to my house for a fun little exercise. As you drive up, the house looks warm and inviting. A nice glow comes from the windows, a thin line of smoke comes from the chimney, and as you walk up the path to the front door, you smell brownies baking. You rub your cold hands together and knock on the door glad to know there is warm chocolate on the other side. You notice the excitement that is rising within you.

When you come in I welcome you, take your coat, and tell you that the brownies, my grandmother's best recipe, just came out of the oven.

To your surprise, I also tell you that they are somewhere in the house, and you get to find them. Blindfolded. You are excited about the lesson (though don't have any idea what this has to do with your vision!), and you put the blindfold on.

Right now, you have a vision—you are going for brownies! You don't know where they are or how you are going to get to them, but your anticipation of the pleasure of having a mouthful of fresh, chewy chocolate gives you a crystal clear vision of your goal. How will you start? You have never been to my house and don't know the layout.

There are two ways you can approach this problem--the first is through rational thought, and the second is what I call "The Smell of Brownies."

If you use rational thought, you divide the house into sections in your mind. There was a door to the left as you walked into the house, so you start there. You move systematically through the house, going back and forth from one end of each room to the other, examining each obstacle as you come to it and clearing it before you

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move to the next. You measure your progress by how much space you have covered, and how far you have come from where you started. This is akin to the search and rescue pattern employed when looking for a lost hiker.

While you will most likely find the brownies (if you don't get distracted, bored, or discouraged along the way) you aren't taking advantage of all the other tools that you have. You get stuck in the mentality that this is the way it has to be, and you miss the opportunity to get to the brownies (your vision) in more direct, unexpected, creative ways. You may get frustrated, tired, or even give up, because you are wasting so much energy doing it the way you've decided it HAS to be done.

So what about using "The Smell of Brownies?" In this method, you sit with your vision for a moment. You pay attention to your other senses, and you sense the smell of brownies off to the right. You remember that there wasn't a door there, but there was a vent. You know from the outside of the house that there is a room on that side, so you figure you will try and go that way.

You go through the door on the left and feel down the wall, thinking there will be a doorway to the right somewhere. You hear a soft click straight ahead—maybe the oven cooling off? You move forward, using all your senses. You come to a doorway and go through it, but the brownie smell gets weaker so you go back.

Again you follow the wall, and you come to a room that is warmer than the last. You smell the brownies more, and come to what feels like a counter. "This must be the kitchen," you think to yourself. You don't think I would leave the brownies in the kitchen, and you follow your intuition and keep moving. You come to another doorway that leads to a cooler room, and the brownies smell is even stronger. You get excited—you are getting closer.

Soon, after some trial and error, you find the brownies, and they are definitely worth it.

More than that, you learned an important lesson. You had to have the vision first—you had to know what you were trying to obtain—but you didn't have to have a concrete, laid out plan to reach it. When you forced a plan (the rational thought method), the path was slow, tedious, and boring, and didn't leave any room for input from your senses or your intuition.

When you followed the smell of the brownies, the journey was exciting and interesting. Your success was measured at each step by how much closer you were to the final goal.

Once you have clearly defined vision, take some time and consider the characteristics of that vision – what are the guiding principles, or the signals you'll receive to let you know that you are getting closer? Take a moment and write down some of these signals – your visions' smell of brownies– that will guide you and shorten the path toward your goal.

Vision and the Smell of Brownies, cont.

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For example, if you are developing a consumer product, you might test for the smell of brownies through feedback. Are potential customers jazzed about your idea and anxious to purchase your innovative new widget? Or, you might have a gut feeling of excitement and satisfaction when you are on track toward your vision, and a feeling of disappointment and discontentment when you are moving in the wrong direction.

Regardless of which path you choose toward your vision, there are decisions you must make as you go. In other installments we will talk more about the methods you can use to make those decisions, which ones work well, and which ones don't.