



08 May 2010

My fellow tréonauts,

Against all the hurly-burly and snot 'n traane over the past few weeks, this week was a ray of light breaking through and if we look up for a moment from our troubles and squint out the bathroom window, you can just about see on the horizon, a beacon pointing our way.

(for the purposes of brevity and a leitmotif I will simply quote lyrics that better poets than me have laboured over to make the same point. I am a big fan of not doing work that's been done before. I leave it as an idle time exercise for you to identify the songs and listen to them, they are very instructive in their lyrics)

We are a company that is as Bevan so aptly put it, 15 going 1.

When I was only seventeen
My head was full of brilliant dreams
My heart would call and I would gladly go
At twenty one the world was mine
And I was yours and you're divine

Man, we walked on the Milky Way.... we were on our way to Venus and you know what, life happens. You have to grow up. BOOM! like that!

We lost our founding partner in a blaze of stupidity. In an extreme sequel just a year later, we lost his wife who ran us and the technician he trained on the network. And a year after that, Kagiso Media - the benevolent patrons that allowed our 10 years of amazing achievements yanked out the trust that allowed that magic to spark and we lost half our revenues in 30 days and painful retrenchment and changes had to be made last year.

We used to be a company that measured our employee service records in double digits. Today, other than Basil and I, a small clump at 2/3/4 years, everybody else in this business is here in time measured in the months. We have had to go from a company that thinks about clients and the problems over the long term eg. East Coast Radio and having a full authority in execution, to working a small piece of the elephant that we have no control over eg. Magnum.

We talk too fast, too esoterically and in too abstract terms for our clients. We needed to change and fast. And we have!

All these new people coming in are speaking the language our clients need to hear in commercial terms. They are the Rosetta Stone between our creative and strategy and customers... they convert intangible into process and money so that we can survive as a business and provide for ourselves.

We are growing up and growing up means knowing your responsibilities. We are not all rocket scientists and we are not all geeks, we are not all tea ladies and we are not all

designers. Guess what. To achieve anything, you need a group of people to work together to achieve a common end. And first, they must agree... we understand where we are going, and second, they must agree that that's where they want to go.

You know, at some point in our lives, each of us wish we could just say fuck it!

*Got a wife and kids in Baltimore, Jack!
I went out for a ride and I never went back.
Like a river that don't know where its flowing,
I took a wrong turn and I just kept going*

We all wish sometimes, that we could take a wrong turn and just keep going. Everybody's got a hungry heart. But if you want the wife and kids and white picket fence, at some point you have to stop dreaming and do - be prepared to commit to a vision and the concomitant sacrifice that comes with that (whatever that sacrifice might mean for you) because nothing great was ever born easily or without struggle. (I myself was born at 4:20 AM in one woeful Wednesday a whole three months premature and mostly dead... and at McCords Hospital in Overport... and my incubator was a heater under my crib. #justsayin).

And so you have to ask, why is this happening to me? and then you have to ask, do I want to stay or do I want to go?

If you say that you are mine
I'll be here 'til the end of time
So you got to let me know
Should I stay or should I go?

and when some of us looked around as asked that question, the answer was yes and so either we change, or shit keeps happening to me.

This change, these questions and these moments of reflection and crisis happens at different times for each of us, (because shit flows downhill). So I, for example, have been through this some time ago. So my change was to invite in new partners who I implicitly knew already shared my vision, to believe in the people who are still in this company who I simply looked in the eye and asked "Will you walk this road with me?" and I took all my money, heart and soul and doubled down on us!

Against the backdrop of the past three years, it has been very hard to pause and reflect and unpack my vision into something that all our people can understand. But strangely, when you pass a milestone like we just did, (the three year Abdul period being over), resolution becomes finer and you can look back and draw conclusions.

The small team who have had to hold it together know the vision. Bevan and Cheryl have had me in their heads for 10 years before they arrived. In that sense, you can add them to the list with Basil and me of 10 years plus service... maybe not to this company, but to the budding of a vision.

To the ones who walked on the Milky Way... A different mission beckons.

To come through that, and to be where we are today, is a stunning testament to what someone commented on yesterday, "a determination to build a vision". Good ideas and visions are cheap. Next time you want one, head over to a street corner, buy a sloop and light up. You should have enough to fill three suitcases by the time you come down.

You know what's not cheap.

execution.

Most successful companies aren't any better than the other guys. They just execute better. They are 100% reliable in their customers eyes. In this, I don't imply that they should be drones or robots or lacking of devoid of passion. I mean that most successful companies merely keep their "word" to their customer. They deliver what they promise, when it was promised and shout hard if anything looks like it might not achieve that result no matter who's fault.

Now, here's the thorny dilemma.

In this new world, how do we "package" what we do in a way that clients understand without destroying the very thing that made us special. This is something that is of direct, personal consequence to me. Because you know why we walked on the Milky Way... was because we were not afraid to try and fail. This takes a special kind of thinking and personality.

The New World wasn't conquered by men who dreamed about it. It was done by men who actually got up one Sunday morning, had breakfast and got on a horse to Southhampton and sailed to Maryland and got scalped by an Injun his fourth Tuesday there when he went out to shit in the woods. You need the red shirts on the away team. The secret is convincing the Red Shirt crew that they are not "that guy" and this is not "that mission". :-)

(I of course wear command gold and come on guys, we are not on THAT mission)

So it takes different kind of animal who gets up to get shot at by Indians. The guys who sign up for the away team think different. That's why they are effective. But guess what, they aren't the company. They aren't the be-all and end all of what we do. Cos they are just the IDEA guys.

and for them to be effective, we have to build something or execute on that idea.... and that takes organisation and teamwork and esprit...

a family builds a house.

and a family has every from the special child to the precious one to the responsible ones...

many of the people who are joining us now and in the months to come are coming in to help build our house and because they share our vision. They are joining our family. And everything we are doing will be easier because of them.

Our house is a very, very fine house
With two cats in the yard
Life used to be so hard

Now everything is easy
'Cause of you

I'll light the fire
And you place the flowers in the jar
That you bought today

(for the record, I am dog person)

In the next year we move to a new home, and a new beginning, a sweet 16 if you will.

it's going to be a very fine house...

We are not a family that is Geek Patrol or immedia or Mediabuddies, we are tréonauts, all cousins on a single mission.

we are in the end, all our brothers keeper, for in the end, who will care for us.

take a moment amid the noise of the smashing and banging and screaming of building that is currently going on, and see the very real achievements that are being nailed up. The money may not be there yet, but can anybody deny it is coming?

And if it comes, can anybody deny that tréo will share? Is there any better place to work for in Durban, in our field, with the dignity of self that you are offered here?

A vision offered by one man is nothing unless it is nurtured and blown to bright, blazing life by the hot breath of people desperate enough to know that if they don't keep blowing, that dim spark of hope that offers our children a better, more relevant future against not Johannesburg, but New York City itself, will be extinguished again.

you say you want a home? you want a life of dignity?

you want 5 weeks of holiday a year?

build it...

and you will have it.

I can see our field of dreams and they are coming....

and if they ask us why we did it, we will say for music and the free electric band.

love

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