


Vision

Your Armour Against the Odds

As a kid, I read a story that has stayed with me for life. The story revolves around two frogs who had lived in the valley all their lives. One day, they decided that they would travel up the hill to see the city that lay on the other side. So, they made the arduous trip and finally reached the hill top. The older frog told the younger one to climb upon his back, stand up and take a peek at the city below. Was it attractive enough for them to continue the journey? So, the younger frog climbed upon his back and exclaimed, "Why brother! That city is just like the one that we left behind!"

"Really?", asked the other. "Then why make this hazardous journey? Let's go back and live in our old homes." So the two frogs went back and continued to live just as they had all along. What they did not realise is that frogs' eyes are positioned at the top of their heads; when the young frog stood up, his eyes were facing backward toward the city that he had just left behind! The story ended saying that all their lives the frogs believed that the city on the other side looked exactly like theirs.

As a child, this story made a deep impact on me. I recognized humor in it but also something more important that I could not lay my finger on. But when I grew up, I realised the immense wisdom of the story teller. Like all classics, this is one that transcends the barriers of time, age and milieus. It can be interpreted in several ways, but

A portrait of P. R. Venketrama Raja, a man with a mustache, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a red patterned tie. He is standing with his hands in his pockets, looking directly at the camera.

P. R. Venketrama Raja

the one thing that stands out for me is how important the right perspective is. Like the famous example of viewing a glass as half full or half empty, perspective determines our lives, the decisions that we take, the things that we hold dear, the dreams that we dream. Perspective can make or break — people, businesses, and visions.

On another level, this story is also about experiencing life in hindsight. All too often, that's how most people learn and by then it's too late. The true visionary though should have foresight—a vision for the future. An oft misunderstood word, vision is not merely a supernatural gift of divination, it's not a 'dream' or a goal to achieve'; neither is it something that you are born with. All too often, it's a choice that has to be actively pursued. It's divination, yes, but it's a divination that is grounded in the realities of today. Often, it's simply the ability to feel the pulse of the situation, so you know which way the tide will turn. Vision and foresight go hand in hand with experience and insight.

When you are at the helm of a world-class enterprise, people describe you as being a visionary, almost by default. However, being an entrepreneur or the top-man in your firm, does not make you a visionary. The true visionary is not necessarily one who is most successful by the world's standards, nor is it one who does the undone; it's someone who does the done differently, who makes alternative life choices.

When we started off in the early 90's as the new IT wing of a burgeoning billion dollar Ramco Group, we could hardly be described as pioneers. There were others who had made a mark and we were miles behind on various scores. We didn't have the kind of resources or budget as other IT giants. But all these disadvantages notwithstanding, we had a vision. We wanted to make world-class IT products right here in India.

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All too often, Indian IT companies have ridden piggyback on the success of products launched by U.S. and European companies. By offering IT services, they ensure that they remain profitable.

We decided however that profitability would not be the be-all and end-all of our existence; we were here because we needed to make a difference and we would do it by choosing to go the alternative route, a narrower route. We made a conscious choice that we would invest more in R&D, even if it meant lesser profitability in the short term. Our dream was to leave behind something that would last, that would be sustainable enough to outlive us.

The choice to focus on ERP was also part of this vision. While at its very basic level, an ERP is about coordination and integration, in the big picture, it's about having insight into the way things run. It's about having better control over how things work, it's about identifying trends and patterns, your strengths and weaknesses so that you can plan for the future. It's about having all the loose ends neatly tied up and turned over into your hand.

Considering how much we believe in vision, it seemed natural to be designing something that would, in turn, gift vision to its users. I believe this is exactly what ERP does at the conceptual level. It's about automating routine processes so that your people are free to strategize your dream, while a software executes it.

As an Indian ERP product, our on-premise model, has made a distinct

mark in the industry. We have succeeded in giving our clients invaluable insight into their business through customized, intelligent reports that are on par with global players. Being an Indian company, we have also been able to provide great cost benefits to our clients along with a strong localization element.

Recently though, we decided to take the vision a step further...in fact, as high as the cloud! With SaaS making waves, we asked ourselves what it would mean to offer ERP as a SaaS offering. Often, we were aware of the fact that an on-premise ERP meant heavy expenses for the client—they had to allocate IT budget, spend on infrastructure, training, installation and maintenance and so on. Customization and licensing also came at additional costs. However, while we empathized with our clients, we could hardly offer expensive technology at a lower cost.

A SaaS offering however would help us do just that. Fueled by this vision, we made extensive investments in R&D, confident that the risks we were taking would pay off.

The first version of RODE was launched in 2008; more recently in 2010, we launched RODE 2.0. The response from the country has been phenomenal.

Clients pay only for what they use, they do not have to invest on IT personnel, additional servers or hardware. All they need is an internet connection and they can plug in and use as many or as few features as they want, paying only for what they use. Truly, a revolutionary example of how technology can be unleashed to produce more advanced technology!

Above all, RODE 2.0 is a testimony to the fact that we dared to actualize our dream! As corporate genius Joel Barker would have put it, "Vision without action is a dream. Action without vision is simply passing the time. Action with Vision is making a positive difference." 