

Visionary Leadership

Discover, Dialogue, Drive

Discover the Vision

A vision is a direction—an attractive and attainable picture of the future. And it is important that every individual, group and organization have one that they can articulate. It is meant to solve real issues and move people to new behaviors. As a leader, if you don't know where you are going, you are irrelevant to you followers. With a vision you can inspire and lift individuals and groups to new heights—an important function of any leader.

Obviously, constructing the vision is the most crucial step, all else hangs on the vision itself. It must motivate people by asking them to change to achieve a new level of behavior or there is really no meaning in and no purpose for the vision. Understanding that vision is about change is crucial to developing a persuasive vision that others will relate to and follow. It implies that you know where you currently are and where you want to go. Your vision must be grounded in commonly accepted core issues if it is to be accepted by the team. If your people do not believe that you understand them and the current situation, they will not be able to see the way to your vision.

That said, the vision can come from almost anywhere. It is not merely a dream but a realistic picture of what could be. It should be pragmatic. In addition, it should be something that you are sincerely passionate about. If you are not passionate about it, it will be difficult for you to get others to get on board and sustain it.

An effective vision must be a meaningful picture of the future that can be fully articulated and shared by all members of the team. Everyone needs to be able to have a part in the vision. A vision is not an end but a means. It provides the direction by which its adherents will achieve a purpose or result.

The vision can be somewhat dynamic and fluid considering the changes in the times and needs of the group. It should be well thought out so that you are able to anticipate the upcoming realities of a given situation and adjust your vision accordingly. This will greatly enhance your chances of success.

Dialogue about the Vision

Once you have the vision firmly in hand, you need to create a dialogue about the vision throughout the organization landscape. You need to make the vision real. Put it in the heart and not just the mind. Get people to see it and then communicate it again and again. Leaders should sound like broken records. Leaders who have succeeded at getting their message across could probably go to the janitor of one of their office buildings and get from that person a sensible answer about what the organization is trying to do.

People want meaning and purpose in their work. Organizational traditions can help give people meaning by providing a sense of why and a broader perspective on their individual functions.

You the leader must live the vision and communicate it in everything that you do. The more you live the vision, the clearer it will become and the more deeply you will understand it. Warren Bennis wrote in, *Old Dogs, New Tricks*, “To communicate a vision, you need more than words, speeches, memos, and laminated plaques. You need to live a vision, day in, day out, embodying it and empowering every other person to execute that vision in everything he or she does, anchoring it in realities, so that it becomes a template for decision making. Actions do speak louder than words.”

Drive the Vision

Finally, you must drive the vision and make it a sustainable part of the group or organization by evaluating everything done in light of the vision and making the appropriate changes where necessary. All decisions must be made in light of the vision.

If the vision was properly crafted it will be easier to drive because it will motivate people to a new level by providing meaning to what they are doing. It will create the link between the present and the future and thus show the way. Find out which people in your organization have the vision “written on their hearts” and have a feel for when decisions, policies and procedures are causing the vision to get off-track. These people can help you make the course corrections you need to make that will help to stabilize and keep the vision in place. A vision can't be all values and platitudes. It must be grounded in facts and the changing realities of your situation.

A vision is meant to solve real issues. Filtered feedback will not create and maintain a vision that people can get passionate about and drive forward. Know your people and know what they are dealing with in an intimate way. Getting good feedback will help you to ensure that the vision is always realistic and appropriately meaningful. Of course, driving the vision is easier if the vision process is interactive from the beginning.