

Leadership instalments

Making Vision Matter

Part One

By Dan Gaynor

TEAMS WITHOUT VISION ARE LIKE BOATS WITHOUT rudders. The right vision sets the course and builds commitment and conviction throughout teams. It binds, unites and energizes people. Ideally, it creates the feeling that we are doing something we care about together. Vision creates purpose. Driven by what the team could become or do, leaders and their teams use vision as a compass that directs the journey. The best vision becomes personal.

Sometimes you are the author, more often you are not. This is not important. Contrary to popular belief all great leaders are not visionaries and they don't need to be. There are far more leaders who must adopt and champion vision than those who actually create it. Regardless of who authored the vision, it is important that you and those you lead embrace and personalize it.

If you've been a part of at least one vision you really cared about then you learned that the right vision made your work and your role that much more meaningful. Thousands of years ago King Solomon, the author of the Book of Proverbs wrote, "People without vision Perish." When work is not grounded in a vision people care about, it is reduced to the means to a paycheck. People without vision do not prosper. Organizations without vision lose a powerful motivating force.

So why does vision drive performance and how do leaders make it work? Let's deal with the first question first. I believe that the right vision, approached the right way, taps a basic human motivator – creativity. We are all wired to create. A carpenter who frames a house has created just as a writer who finishes a short story has created. We want to leave something more than we found and this is what the best visions achieve – it's the difference between coming to work each day to "turn the wheel for another eight hours" and coming to build something. That something can be a company or product or service you care about.

Now let's move to the second question: How do leaders make it work? The best corporate visions work because everyone and not just the senior executives care enough about them to work toward them. This introduces an important facet of great visions: they are accepted



to be in the best interest of everyone in the organization and not just the bosses. I see so many vision statements that clearly look like they are in the interest of senior executives and shareholders but offer little inspiration to everyone else. To make vision matter you must strive for something everyone cares about.

To fuel performance vision must become more than a plaque on the wall that company officials refer to once a year at annual meetings. So provided you have a vision that employees care about there is something else, something powerful and simple, you can do to help it take hold: talk about it a lot.

As a leader, your example is powerful - probably more powerful than you know. And your everyday conversations say a lot about your priorities. We all talk about things that matter to us and ignore things that don't. So if you're not talking about vision, if it isn't a part of your daily and weekly conversations around the office, you may not realize that you're sending a powerful message that it doesn't really matter. If you talk about it frequently, if you're excited about it when you do, you send the right message.

Talk about the vision for the company and its future frequently and passionately and make sure it's something others can get genuinely excited about and you're on your way to a powerful force that can build commitment, bind a team together and build performance. In next month's instalment we'll look at four common mistakes leaders make with vision.

For more on the fundamentals of building strong productive teams call for a workshop.