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Vision: How Leaders See The Invisible

By Eric Garner

The one thing that distinguishes great leaders from also-rans is the power, depth, and breadth of their vision.

Vision is a strange concept. It's much more than just a goal or purpose. Goals simply state what we aim to achieve. Visions paint a fuller picture describing our most cherished dreams, hopes and possibilities.

1. Seeing Possibilities. The ability to see possibilities that others don't see is one of the hallmarks of great leaders. Where most of us see just a consignment of goods, leaders see an exciting product that can change someone's life. Where most of us see an office with space for desks and filing cabinets, leaders see a place where teams can do groundbreaking work. Where most of us see people with names and titles, leaders see budding organizational champions. As George Bernard Shaw said, "Some people see things as they are and ask "Why?" I see things that are not and ask "Why not?""

2. Clear and Compelling. Management writer Warren Bennis was fascinated by the ability of leaders to see what the rest of us can't see. A few years ago, he carried out a study of 90 top leaders in the United States. They included the first man to set foot on the moon, Neil Armstrong. What Bennis discovered was that, despite their different backgrounds, disciplines, and circumstances, these people all had one thing in common: a clear and compelling vision of what they wanted to realise. To them, the vision wasn't at some point in the future. It was right in front of their eyes.

3. A Vision Without Limits. The truly great leaders don't put limits on their vision. They go for the biggest dream they can imagine even if it is only realized at some time in the future when they are no longer around. There is a story about the filmmaker Walt Disney who died six years before the opening of the first Disney World. At the opening ceremony, two Disney executives were sitting together. One said, "Too bad Walt couldn't have been here to see this." The other replied, "You're wrong. Walt did see it. That's why it's here.". While most of us see no more than three months ahead, outstanding leaders can see several years ahead. Elliott Jaques of Brunel University believed that one person in a million can see 20 years ahead. The Japanese industrialist Konosuke Matsushita even has a 250-year plan for his business.

4. Drawing Others In. Leaders do more than have a vision of what is possible; they articulate it and draw others in. They do this through metaphor, images, and by triggering the innate desire of all people to be part of something big. Compare the visions of the two leading soft-drinks companies in America in the 1920's. One was a Boston-based company called Moxies. Their stated aim was "to sell herb-based drinks". Nothing to get excited about there. The other company's vision was "to quench the thirst of a nation". That company was Coca Cola. Today, nobody remembers Moxies.

5. Action. Without action, visions are just dreams. They are creations of our imagination, no more. But with action and the ability to see the steps from where we are now to where we can be, dreams become reality. In Shell UK, managers are taught to develop a quality known as "helicopter vision". This is the ability to see across three time zones of the future, as if in a hovering helicopter. From here, you can see the near plains, the middle range foothills and the distant peaks. Being able to see all three zones at once harmonizes your tactical actions, your operational planning and your overall

strategy. There is a clear map to the realization of the vision.

We all dream but few of us remember our dreams let alone act on them. But leaders are different. They make a difference to our daily lives and our collective lives. They do this by capturing our dreams, nurturing them with care, and in the fullness of time helping us bring them to the glorious light of day.

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To Be An Effective Leader, Do A Check-up From The Neck Up

By Della Menechella

Before we can effectively lead anyone, we must take an introspective view of ourselves. We must do a check-up from the neck up. We must be certain that the thoughts and attitudes we hold are in alignment with the role we perform.

Check Your Vision

As a leader you need to have vision of what you want your team to accomplish. A vision is more than just a statement; it is a complete picture with all the details of your accomplished goal. During my leadership workshops, the participants do an exercise during which they write a paragraph that describes the vision they hold for their organization. As I watch them complete this exercise, the one

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thing that strikes me is that most of the participants are not smiling. If the vision they are creating does not inspire them, how can they possibly expect it to inspire others?

When you create a vision, do not be held back by perceived limitations. When your vision is exciting enough, you and your team members can find a way to overcome them. When our country's leaders had a vision of putting a man on the moon there were many apparent limitations, including not having the technology available to make the vision a reality. However, when the vision came alive to the individuals who worked on the NASA team, they discovered the technology that was required to make the vision happen.

Make sure your vision excites you if you want it to excite your team.

Check Your Attitude

As leaders, we must deal with many stresses and challenges on a daily basis. Sometimes they can cause us to feel overwhelmed. If we are not feeling positive we must do whatever is necessary to change our attitude before we meet with our team. Our team looks to us for encouragement. Part of our role as a leader is to help our team members move forward with a positive attitude.

As leaders, we must be diligent about our attitude so we stay motivated. It is the only way we can possibly motivate others.

Check Your Behavior

Everyone looks to the leader to determine what he or she should do. In order to be an effective leader, your behavior must match your message. You must model the behavior you want your team members to follow. If you say one thing and do something different, your team will follow what you do and not what you say.

If you want your group to meet their commitments, make sure you meet yours. If you want your associates to do whatever it takes to get a project done on time, then roll up your sleeves and pitch in

to do what you can to help them meet their deadline. Like it or not, your behavior is the benchmark that everyone will look to and use as a guide for their own. Demonstrate what you want them to do by modeling the appropriate behavior for them.

This check-up from the neck up is not a one-time event. Just as we need to take our cars in for periodic check-ups to assure they run effectively, we need to do periodic check-ups to make sure that we are effective in our roles as leaders.

Della Menechella is a speaker, author, and trainer who inspires people to achieve greater success from the inside out. She is a contributing author to *Thriving in the Midst of Change* and the author of the videotape *The Twelve Commandments of Goal Setting*. She can be reached at

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