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HOW TO CREATE A LEADERSHIP VISION DRIVEN BY INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

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DEFINING LEADERSHIP

Defining leadership can be difficult. A myriad of classes, books, seminars, and articles ardently define with vigor their version of leadership. An analysis of these definitions, though, reveals that leadership can be a vague, overreaching, and gray concept. However, there are some commonalities in the various schools of thought. Most people seem to agree on the following. Leaders have passion. They have a vision that they communicate to their followers. And they have

a values system that illustrates how to get to that vision. Positive leadership enjoins all three attributes fluidly into a cohesive tapestry. Passion is the artistry, vision the template, and values are the thread that binds it all together. This guide will present a brief overview of these three grand components of leadership.

Think, for a moment, of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have A Dream" speech. That speech changed lives because of the vision it inspired, because of the values of equality and fairness it engendered, and mostly because of the passion it radiated. Great, heroic leaders in history such as FDR, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. had passion and stirred people toward high levels of fervor, fueled by admiration in their followers and hate in their opponents. Passion is often intrinsic, beginning as a seedling deep within a person, catalyzed and provoked by a leader's desire to move the masses. It is two-way, the leader molding her zeal with that of the crowd, instigating movement in a common direction. Psychologically speaking, passion is another way of saying intrinsic motivation. Leaders often hit barriers to their plans and if they lack the intrinsic fortitude to persevere, their vision and values can easily be diffused.

Leadership requires a vision—and I don't mean just a photograph or an image in the leader's head. I mean a complete understanding for the big picture of where the leader wants to be. Leadership guru Stan Slap says that the vision should be a better place than where we are today. It should be a clearly communicable picture of the future, steeped in value, and philosophy, as well as structure. A clear vision provides direction and establishes purpose. For example, a training department may have a clear vision for curriculum development. They know what it will look like three years from now. When a problem arises, their vision facilitates them toward a solution. When their vision is challenged by outside forces, they have the structural strength to defend it. A clear vision is not always completely agreed on by all followers; it doesn't have to be. The vision belongs to the leader, and the followers work with the leader to find the best way to get to it. Great visionary thinking utilizes a symbiotic relationship between the leader and the follower, fostering collaboration, innovation, and camaraderie.

Finally, leaders have a set of values that set the standard for how they will attain their vision. These values are the rules that go beyond just descriptive words, such as "integrity" or "results orientation." In fact, a word such as "integrity" has become so overused in values statements that its meaning has been watered down to a generic, useless lump that makes executives feel good that they went through a fuzzy, humanistic activity. True values need to contain a deeper meaning, an application within the context of the organization, and a passion for adhering to them. The exercise of generating values organizationally is pointless unless the leader's organization is willing to change its culture to fit the values, or conversely, the values are actual descriptions of the current organizational culture.

VISION

I must admit to a certain fatigue when I hear about that vision thing. Outside the obtuse uses of the word “values” running rampant throughout the business community, “vision” must be the most overused, misunderstood, and abused word around. Vision statements, mission statements, strategic plans, roadmaps, and blueprints litter our offices. Visioning has been a boon for the consulting industry, creating lots of billable hours. The output is a verbose document no one will ever read that clearly clarifies nothing. How many organizations do you know that actually refer to their vision in detail as they set goals with individual employees and develop operational metrics for departments? I haven’t run into too many.

Now, I realize the previous paragraph makes it sound like I oppose visioning as an evil entity that might bring about the end of the world on a *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* episode, but I don’t. In fact, I believe that creating a vision is the most important function of leadership. I think Jim Collins walks on water, too. A good vision establishes a beacon of light that both the leader and the followers can latch onto and use to guide them from the day-to-day minutia that potentially can sidetrack even the most pure of heart.

A vision is simply a picture of an ideal state of what the leader wants her organization to be sometime in the future. In *Transforming Leadership*, James MacGregor Burns talks about the dual communicative ownership of the vision between the leader and the followers. The leader constructs her vision in language that meets some of, or maybe even all of the realized needs of the followers. This means that the leader often follows the designated followers. Leadership, then, is a robust and dynamic process; a dance between two poles, each taking the lead, each following the other. But it is the leader who molds, interprets, communicates, and portrays the vision.

Visioning then, precludes a discussion of leaders and followers. Who decides what the vision is, who contributes to it, who makes it operational, and who lives for it? To have a vision in an effective organization requires that there be only one vision guiding those in it.

Stan Slap says that leadership requires a vision of a place that is better than where we are, along with an ability to communicate that vision clearly so that people want to embrace it.¹ Perhaps what we really want is for our staff to manage the vision handed to them; to inspire the masses toward that goal and not some other, and to act as captains to someone else’s lead. For example, it is the CEO, the board of directors, and the executive team who truly define the vision, values, and direction for the organization, both operationally and philosophically. Leadership is a mobilization process, a gathering of followers in such a way that determines movement toward a delineated and accepted objective. Management teams must be focused and per-

¹Stan Slap, *Bury My Heart in Conference Room B* (Key-Note, 2002)..

suasive, but persuasion, though thoroughly connected to leadership, can reside and occur without it. To be persuasive about someone else's vision is to be an instrument for that leader, and that fact does not take away from their persuasiveness. If all of us are leaders in our respective roles, then who is following? The notion that we at times take a leadership role is understandable. I may take the lead on a project or come up with a great idea that gets implemented. But most often, this situational leadership role is accurately called management. These moments occur within the context of the leader's vision for that group's future. True leadership is sustained, inspiring, arousing, and cannot happen universally. It often involves an organizational change or shift in thinking. There must be some discretion as to who is a leader and who is a follower. If we continue to insist on universal leadership, then at best, using the common definitions of leadership documented in an abundance of the literature, we have a politically correct form of anarchy. And most importantly, there is nothing wrong with being a follower. Followers are overpoweringly imperative to the design, development, and implementation of a vision. We should respect that role as much as the role of leader. Visions remain visions without action making them real. Both parts are essential.

When thinking about creating a vision, I like to answer the following questions. They help guide me in illustrating not only the pragmatic issues of what I do, but also the idealistic and magical endeavors that arouse my passions.

- What does your team do? (Duh. But you must walk before you run.)
- Why do you do it? Why do you exist? (This is the purpose or mission.)
- What do you want it to do? Why? (Here is part 1 of the actual vision.)
- How does your team change lives? Does it? Can it? Should it? (This is part passion, part vision.)
- Please draw a picture describing what your team does. Avoid words to describe it. (This is a cognitive way of conceptualizing an abstraction.)
- Now, using words, fill in any blanks. (Ditto.)
- What characteristics make your team unique and special? (We get to know the followers.)
- How do these characteristics aid in what it does?
- How does your team fit into the big picture of your organization? (This is the alignment part.)
- If you had a magic wand, what changes would you make to your team? Why? (Vision, part 2)

- What barriers exist to impede your team’s ability to reach what you want to do? (Understand the current state.)
- What threatens your existence? (For example, budget, though accurate, is not specific enough—what is it about the budget that threatens your existence? Ditto.)
- What opportunities could your team grasp if you wanted to? (See the roses through the rose-colored glasses.)
- What do you want your team to look like next year? (“Same as now” is not an acceptable answer: vision, part 3.)

VALUES

Recently, executives have tended to explain the greatness of their organizations by clearly identifying and establishing values statements. It occurred to me—and I realize I am certainly not the first to be hit in the face by this epiphany—that this very powerful movement toward a values-driven work environment faces 2 challenges.

1. There is a dichotomy between a values statement and the application of the value, which leaves a wide gap that affects performance. As mentioned, a word such as “integrity” has become so overused in values statements that it is virtually meaningless. True values need to contain a deeper meaning (an application within the context of an organization) and encourage a passion for adhering to them.

2. There is a schizophrenic tendency to espouse ill-defined principles and then behave in a completely different way. Sometimes the hardest thing to do is to really figure out our own values systems. What do we really care about? We see this in political speeches all the time. Everyone agrees that compassion is good, but we have programs that offer charity by diminishing the self-esteem and sense of well-being of their recipients. How these universal values manifest in society differs from group to group.

For example, the owner of one company wished so desperately to have a business that valued creativity, new ideas, and high quality that he went out and got what he wanted. He chose the best people available to enhance collaboration and to learn from each other. He wanted an environment where people would have the flexibility to be their best and therefore hit home runs with customers. In fact, he spent years and many dollars trying to implement and apply values he, although unaware, didn’t actually believe in or need. In reality, he valued alignment, safety, control, implementation, steadiness, and hierarchical respect. The words coming out of his mouth were not compatible with how he acted. His people experienced the implementation of the second set of values as dismissive, disrespectful, and reductive because their expectations were different. To compensate for the dissonance he experienced, he micromanaged, undermined

independent thinking, and stifled the much-vaunted creativity. The resulting exodus that followed over the years left him with a group of drones who would shout “Yes! How high?”

Today, however, he is successful, mostly because there is a correlation with what he espouses and how he behaves. Sometimes a word or an idea that is positive, seduces us. Honesty and openness; collaboration and respect are so appealing as value statements. They glide off the tongue and reverberate effortlessly through our courts. But are they legitimate descriptions of how we live, how we work, and who we are? We don’t challenge the validity or merit of a value like *collaboration*. On the other hand, are we living the essence of collaboration when how we behave is, “We’re not going to help you. You do it. And tough nuggies”?

So what does this have to do with leadership? Often, these value statements just sit around in frames on the wall, gathering dust. Why do values matter so much? Simply, values are the standards by which we operate. They are fundamental to our identity. They are rules that dictate our behavior and inform our choices. Our values act as guides toward implementing the organizational vision.

Believe me. I am not challenging the validity or merit of values like integrity and collaboration. To the contrary, I think these are fundamental constructs of communal living; core attributes for how we function, work, and live together. Ultimately, unfortunately, they have been reduced to simply letters put together to form words, the meaning stripped from the foundation because the subtlety and nuance of their application have been ignored. I am saying that living by a set of espoused values is hard work. Values must be clearly defined, operationalized, and applied. They should be measured, and organizations should decide how the balance of the personal values of the individual employees is reconciled with the noted organizational values.

Are we really willing to see what values truly drive us toward our vision, or are we willing to be blind for the sake of expediency, conflict avoidance, and ignorance? Most important, are we willing to do the work? There is a reason most organizations avoid a proper values discussion. It’s hard work. We don’t have a heck of a lot of time to do our day jobs as it is. But in the end, it is pretty simple: Do the work and our organizations can be even greater than they already are. Don’t do the work properly, and your leadership should be questioned.

It is easy to fall into the quagmire of creating semantically meaningless statements. But the challenge to go deeper, to foster values-supported behaviors is so vital to the leadership and future of an organization, that we must avoid the temptation to view values determination as a one-time activity. As a part of leadership, values are dynamic, should be robust, and must be lived. For leadership’s sake, failure must not be an option.

What can you do? The first step is to be able to answer the following questions:

1. First identify what distinguishes your organization from others. What values and what beliefs make you unique and special? How do your values support and validate what you do? What values are necessary for the growth and development of your company?
2. Are you aware of the cultural drives that affect the values system?
3. Are you being honest with yourself? Are you willing to disregard a value you think you already have and support when it really isn't reflected in your organization?
4. The converse is true as well. Are you willing to acknowledge a value that is present, but not one you would espouse? Are you willing to engage in long-term and hard-to-do cultural change if that value isn't necessarily attractive?
5. Values like integrity, good communication, respect, honesty, etc. are wonderful values. They are also unclear. Can you define your values specifically, contextually, and clearly?

PASSION

As mentioned, passion, to me, is synonymous with intrinsic motivation. So when we talk about passionate leaders, we are really talking about leaders who are themselves inspired by the vision they have. Intrinsic motivation affects leadership in 2 ways: (1) The leader is motivated to lead, and (2) the followers are inspired to follow. For the sake of explanation, I will focus on how followers are passionate, or intrinsically motivated, about the leader's vision. However, the leader must feel that internal burn for her own vision just as strongly, or she will just be the fizz on top of a freshly drawn glass of Coca Cola—slowly bubbling away to nothing.

Motivation is the driving energy that catalyzes behavior. Ultimately, a leader's goal is to create what is called an *intrinsically motivating environment*. An intrinsically motivating environment occurs when a follower is able to excel using motivators found in the environment. Essentially, when the motivators are present, followers have a perceived choice to follow.

Many prescriptive models have been developed as methods for increasing productivity and efficiency in the workplace. The big questions are which model works and how do we make it operational? The challenge: Most motivators are externally regulating. It is easy to understand how money and other materialistic items can be controlling, but value systems, cultural constructs, and organizational dynamics can also be controlling. When a motivator is controlling, its benefits and its effect are short-term and will remove the focus from

the desired behavior. An explanation that further details some of the potentially damaging effects of extrinsic motivation follows.

The idea of internal and external motivation is, on the surface, easy to grasp. If I do a better job because my employer offers me a bonus, I have been *externally* motivated. If I do a better job because it makes me proud of myself, I have been *internally* motivated. However, the more complicated, and perhaps more useful principle is the difference between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* motivation. Many of us tend to confuse intrinsic/extrinsic with internal/external. A bigger mistake could not be made!

- *Intrinsically*: Intrinsic motivation occurs when I am passionate about a task and perform it for the sheer pleasure of it.
- *Extrinsically*: Extrinsic motivation occurs when I perform a task because some force, either external to me (money, rewards, punishment) or internal to me (a value or a belief that impacts my sense of self-worth) drives me to perform.

	<i>Intrinsic</i>	<i>Extrinsic</i>
External	Not Applicable	Money Bonuses Punishment/praise (contingent on performance)
	When one has a passion for performing a task. When one performs a task for the sheer pleasure of it. When one freely chooses to perform a task.	Belief/value systems Guilt Ego gratification Punishment/praise (attached to one's self-esteem)
Internal		

Self-determination (from the extensive and well-researched work of Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan of the University of Rochester) is a model of motivation that incorporates some of the best attributes of other theories and then adds the one component many models miss—an explanation for more intrinsic impetuses for behavior. It is a system that prescribes methods for increasing intrinsic motivation and decreasing the impact of extrinsic motivation. Self-determination theory has 3 important components that must be present for an individual to be motivated:

1. *Competence*. I am competent if I perceive myself as successful at goal-directed activities and goal attainment. A sense of compe-

tence must be present for me to be intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. Competence means that I am capable of performing the task and have the capacity to do it.

This can be achieved by providing me with the skills, knowledge, and resources to accomplish a task inherent to the leader's vision. It is also achieved by balancing, in partnership with me, what is on my plate, so I am not overwhelmed with too much to do.

2. *Autonomy/control.* Autonomy is the perception that self-determination or a sense of internal self-control is within my capability. A sense of autonomy must be present for intrinsic motivation to occur. Control is the reverse of autonomy. In other words, if feeling competent but controlled will lead to extrinsic motivation. Control occurs when I sense that I do not have a choice in the matter. This undermines any sense of passion or pleasure that may arise from performing the task the leader has set forth.

Often leaders fear the concept of being “autonomy supportive.” However, what the leader must realize is that supporting autonomy does not imply a permissive, no-holds-barred, excuse for “anything goes.” Rather, the question becomes, given the objectives and goals of the team, what choices are present in how a task can be done and prioritized. Any choice is contextualized within the reality of the work environment and the boundaries necessary for team, division, and organizational success.

3. *Relatedness.* Relatedness is the feeling I have that I am emotionally tied to significant others in my life.

By involving me in discussions about policy and decisions, leaders increase the sense of relatedness I have for the team and the organization.

So from the perspective of the follower, intrinsic motivation is useful for creating long-term commitment and sustainability for a leader's vision. The leader, fundamentally, before developing a vision and identifying values must have a sense of competence regarding the challenge(s). The leader must freely choose to take the challenge and run with it, must develop a relationship, aligning both structure and involvement between potential followers and the organization as a whole. Some tips for designing and implementing intrinsically motivating environments from the leader's perspective are:

- *Engage.* Involving followers is one of the criteria for an intrinsically motivating environment. From the initial stages of designing a work environment that incorporates choice, competence and relatedness, engage the team in developing the best process for that group.

- *Know your team.* Since your team is made up of many different individuals with many different intrinsic motivators, get to know their passions in life, at work and beyond. Knowing them, and letting them know you, is one of the best ways to increase a sense of belonging.
- *Know your objectives and team goals.* It is imperative to know the “facts” of what must be accomplished. You have a job to do, and your team has to achieve it. These objectives make up your boundaries and establish the rules for what your vision looks like and when it can be completed.
- *Make sure you have resources and guides.* One of the greatest inhibitors to intrinsic motivation (extrinsic too) is an organizational and functional barrier to performance. Make sure that you have the resources available to your team and the appropriate time allowances for completing what must be done.
- *Make known the “facts of life.”* Inform team members up front what is expected of the team and what boundaries, constraints, rules, goals, and measures are inherent to their work environment.
- *Provide choices.* Given the “facts of life,” engage team members in determining how to move forward, how to achieve what is expected, and how to establish their own measurement system to promote their own accountability. This process should also include a coaching process by which individuals are coached to be more self-determined within the boundaries of the organization and the team.
- *Establish avenues for skill enhancement.* Team members must perceive their own competence. Provide training, coaching, mentoring, and peer support when employees need it. Be proactive and ensure that employees are comfortable asking for help when they need it.
- *Constantly engage the team.* Inform the team about meetings you attend. Let them in on the “secrets” that may seem unimportant to you, but can be construed as hidden information. Share. Share. Share. When decisions need to be made, engage the team in that process. It might be as simple as informing them about a decision you had to make, and questioning them on how they should implement it, or it might include the whole team developing a solution to the problem. Either way, the name of the game is to involve.
- *Evaluate.* Obviously you will have objectives from “above” (even if you think you are as “above” as it gets) that determine how you and the team will be measured. These measures need to be communicated as “facts of life,” and then both the team and individuals need to be evaluated regularly and often. The focus of these evaluations should be on performance, not compensation and rewards. Remove any link between these evaluations to compensation and focus on individual development and growth.

CONCLUSION

Although great leaders have common traits, more often the manifestation of leadership is unclear. How to be a leader is instinctive, a combination of learned skills and abstractions of character. There is a wonderful story about the great actor Laurence Olivier. William Goldman in his book, *What Lie Did I Tell?* describes how one night Olivier gave an exceptionally good performance of “Hamlet.” He had been performing the role on and off for years, but that night something was especially wonderful. Inspiration oozed from him. The audience was rapt and his fellow performers moved to greatness themselves. At the end of the night, his costar went to his dressing room to congratulate Olivier on his accomplishment. She found him sitting at his dressing table, his costume and makeup still on, his head buried in his hands.

“Larry, what’s wrong?” she asked. “You were brilliant tonight.”

“I know,” he said.

“Then why do you seem so upset?” she asked.

Olivier replied, “I don’t know how I did it.”

Even the great leaders of our day such as FDR, Bill Gates, and Martin Luther King, Jr. have a difficult time, as did Olivier, explaining how they did it. In today’s twitch speed environment the imposition of leadership is everywhere. Organizations insist their employees should all be leaders without ever giving direction for how to do so, and leaders who really are leaders haven’t done the work it takes to actually “make it so.” We are left with a semantic lack of clarity over the general use of the word “leadership.” People are unsure of what to do and how to do it. No one standing at a podium announcing that everyone has the ability and responsibility to be a leader has also provided a recipe for how to do it. Still, the amount of pressure we put on individuals to be leaders is astonishing. It is easy to write a trite article espousing the “three innate attributes of leadership,” but leadership is much more than exposition. Leadership is nebulous. It is artistic. It isn’t scientific.

Perhaps, the fashion in twenty-first century America will be to value the inspirational tendencies great leadership exhibits without recognizing the organizational consequences and operational disruptiveness of such endeavors when management skills and individual contribution is not equally valued. In other words, we need managers to manage. We need staff to be staff, and we need a few good people, *anywhere in the system*, to rise above the fray and lead. Of course, leadership is a wonderful thing. In fact, I would argue it is the most fundamental and critical component of organizational management. But we must stop politicizing leadership as a function of all employees. We need leaders, at all levels, who can, as Stan Slap² says, get us to take their hand and follow them toward a better place in the world.

²Ibid.