

leadership instalments

Inspiring With Vision

By Dan Gaynor

FOR MANY PEOPLE, JANUARY IS A REFLECTIVE TIME, the past year closes and the new one, with all its possibilities, opens. What better time to give some thought to vision? Vision is all about seeing possibilities. Effective leaders use it to inspire people to reach for something worthwhile. Leaders who can describe a vision of something better, then direct people and resources toward it, rarely have difficulty building dedicated teams. Everyone wants to be led toward something better, it's leaders without vision who often fail them. Think of vision as the foundation of the team.

Each time I interviewed people for the organizations I led, I would tell them about two types of people: those who put in time to earn a paycheck, and those who come each day to build something they care about. I wanted people who cared about being a part of something bigger. These are the people who work with passion. They are the people who drive great teams forward. They can't be a part of something bigger if you can't see it and describe it first. They need vision.

Vision delivers several corporate benefits: it gives work a sense of purpose, it gives leaders a sense of purpose, it provides a framework for daily decisions, and it binds people together in common cause. This is why vision is such a powerful force in the hands of skillful leaders.

Vision should be something you talk about with each potential new recruit. The most effective leaders don't just look for workers, they find people who want what they want for the team, and are inspired to help them achieve it. If someone is not genuinely excited by the vision you describe during an interview, he or she is not a good fit for the team. For a lot of senior leaders, changes to corporate vision often precipitate their own departures. I know I've left organizations because a change in ownership brought a change in vision that I was not comfortable with - either spoken or demonstrated - and rightly so. Vision should be a key factor in deciding who goes and who stays. If it is not, you'll end up with a lot of people putting in time.

All worthwhile vision is unselfish, it puts the team's interests first. Your vision is right when most of the people around you see it as

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worth doing. If they detect anything self-serving, you'll create cynicism and maybe even anger. This leaves visions that describe financial objectives out. Money is important, but it can't be the focal point of vision.

Vision can and should be powerful, but it has been diminished in recent years by too many leaders who talk too much about it, and do too little to act on it. Vision finds its power in action. Solid planning and meaningful accountability are essential to vision. Leaders who talk about vision but don't deliver the goods turn their employees off and undermine their authority.

As we enter the first month of the new year, I encourage you to revisit your vision. If you are not the senior leader, don't be dismayed, you can still offer a vision that will make work meaningful. Think about what you are leading your team toward. Think about what you want to change or to build. All great leadership is about change, it's about leading people toward something worth doing - that's vision.

Discussion questions:

1. What was the most inspiring vision you were ever involved in and how did it affect your experience on the team?
2. How would you describe the vision you have for your team?
3. When was the last time you talked about vision or helped people see how your plans align with that vision?

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