

leadership instalments

Making Vision Matter

Part Two

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LAST MONTH WE LOOKED AT THE WAY VISION CAN DRIVE team performance – the way it can bind teams together and create purpose. We looked at the connection between vision and creativity and talked about some simple steps leaders take to establish vision throughout their teams. But in many companies vision has a bad rap. With this instalment we'll look at common missteps – the most common mistakes leaders make.

Too many leaders don't live the visions they espouse. Here we find the first mistake. Leaders don't appreciate how powerful their example is and the more powerful the leader the more significant the example. When a leader promotes a vision he contradicts by example cynicism is sure to follow. And senior leaders are not just responsible for their own examples. They must ensure subordinate leaders are setting the right example as well. When they are not, they must do something about it.

There are other mistakes. To be effective vision must also be unselfish. Too many business leaders try to sell a vision that has little or no relevance to those they lead because it only benefits the people at the top. The boss may be inspired by improved share prices when he or she holds options, but it won't do much for employees. It may well create cynicism. Corporate performance goals like earnings or revenues have little or no relevance for employees, (yes I know we all want employees to appreciate the value of revenue but it won't resonate with most.) The best visions work because they inspire people to commit their best efforts toward achieving things they care about.

In virtually every leadership role I held I spoke of the creation of a great team – a team that was great to be a part of and one that accom-

plished great things. I believe it connected with people because there was something in it for everyone and they knew it mattered to me. I was willing to make changes to achieve it, both at a staff and leadership level and so others could see it moving forward.



One of the worst offences I have seen is leaders who try to force feed vision. They insist their employees memorize the corporate vision. They put them through embarrassing public tests asking members to recite the “Golden Words” correcting them publicly when they fail. No wonder these employees resent the vision and the executive who forced it. It doesn't really matter at all that your employees get every word right, it does matter that they understand the vision and care enough about it to want to work hard toward it. So make sure you talk about it. Sell it but don't force it. Help others get excited about it and they'll start working hard to achieve it. Let vision develop and don't force it.

The other common mistake is the failure to follow through with plans and assignments. I worked with one organization years ago that formed committees and took employees on lavish retreats to engage them in developing vision but then did nothing to give it traction.

All vision must lead somewhere and have resources and work attached to it if it is to inspire others. Connecting resources, plans and even individual assignments to vision sends the message that you're serious about it and that it is going somewhere.

I'm sure there are other mistakes as well but if you can avoid these four by setting the right example, making sure it is a group vision, fostering it rather than forcing it and connecting plans and resources to it you'll be well on your way to making vision matter. You will lead a team that thrives rather than perishes.

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