

Luttrell on Leadership
by
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What's Your Vision?

There was a time when cars were a marvel, before the price of gas was so dear and environmental considerations were a factor. People went for “Sunday drives,” with no particular destination, no definite schedule, and no purpose beyond the pleasure of seeing the sights, exploring the countryside, and enjoying the companionship of those along for the ride. A business without purpose and vision is like a perpetual Sunday drive, except more stressful and involving greater risk.

An organization with a clear and compelling vision is much more likely to achieve great things. The energies and resources of the enterprise are set on a bold path toward something meaningful. A strong vision captures the heart and passion of the enterprise, and kindles the fire that fuels it to persevere through both good and bad times.

Although it's often useful to have a Vision Statement, what's more important is to have a vision. That is, to have a strong sense of purpose and direction, a picture of your desired future state. Imagine it as a huge magnet that draws you and your organization forward. Whether your organization includes scores of people or just a few, there is no substitute for the power of intention and commitment that a clear vision provides.

A vision answers the question of *why* the organization wants to do what it does in the world. It implies a purpose beyond the present, and paints a picture of what could be. A Vision Statement is a sentence or two or three that captures and distills these concepts.

However, both in management literature and in everyday use, there is frequent confusion between the terms Vision and Mission. So let's clarify these definitions. A Mission Statement answers the literal question, *What does our organization do?*, while a Vision Statement answers the questions, *Where are we going?* and *Why?*

There are many effective methods for developing an organizational vision. Like anything important, it is no small challenge, but certainly worth the effort required. Otherwise, individuals are left to carry out their part of the enterprise on their own, limited by their particular perspective, without the benefit of a larger sense of purpose and aspiration.

In an organization, numerous hearts and minds must be engaged. Gone are the days when leaders could expect people to follow them based simply on allegiance. This then becomes part of the work of leadership, to provide opportunities for the organization to develop, expand, and update its vision so that many share it. It is the leader's role to ensure there is an inspiring vision that brings out the best in the organization's people.

Groups have a need for shared values and goals. A shared vision generates enthusiasm, excitement, and a sense of collective identity that is greater than the sum of its parts. It unifies a group. It encourages hopes and dreams. It states positive outcomes. It uses word pictures, images and metaphors, which are powerful communicators.

The resulting focus and confidence makes obstacles easier to overcome. Decision-making is easier and better, directing attention and resources to the priorities of the organization. A compelling vision reduces cynicism and negativity and engenders camaraderie and a sense of ownership. It helps you hire the right people in the first place and then further helps you build teamwork and cooperation. It gives meaning to what otherwise might be routine or difficult work. It honors the heart and soul of your organization, complimenting the strategic and skill-based efforts that are also required to achieve success.

Still not convinced? Perhaps an illustration will paint the picture on a personal basis. Imagine you or a loved one has a serious medical condition requiring hospitalization. Which would you choose: a hospital that has no particular vision for itself as an organization, where medical and nursing services are provided according to the level of skill and commitment of whoever happens to be on duty at the time? Or would you choose a hospital that has a clear vision for providing top quality care and healing, for treating

each patient as a whole person, where management practices, work standards, and employees are all dedicated to that vision?

An organization's vision is facilitated and exemplified by its leaders. It is lived out everyday, by everyone.

What's your vision?

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Mary Luttrell helps business leaders turn challenges into opportunities that move their organizations to new levels of success. With more than 25 years of consulting experience, she is known for her ability to simplify complexity by creating an inspired yet practical plan of action. Ms. Luttrell is a Certified Management Consultant whose firm was named one of the *100 Leading Management Consulting Firms in North America* by industry analyst James Kennedy. To receive her white paper on *The Four Cornerstones of Business Success*, contact Ms. Luttrell at 707-887-2256 or thecoach@sonic.net.