

Five ways to ensure your vision inspires change

Many CEOs struggle with crafting and communicating a picture of the future that draws others in. A vision, which expresses how you would like your company to be, brings clarity and excitement. It can align founders, management and shareholders, and can become a heartfelt force in a company's soul.

It is easy to trot out the usual examples of 'strong vision' - Apple, Ford, Facebook etc. Yet it is far harder for CEOs of more modest companies to create and communicate a new emerging vision.

Many CEOs feel uneasy about the vision thing. It somehow becomes this slippery issue that never really makes it from the flipchart into the hearts of their team. They just don't nail it. Failing derails their mandate to lead. Others provide a glimpse into the future but are unable to motivate their companies to move into that future.


So, gleaned from our work with multiple leadership teams, here's our top five tips for communicating your vision in a compelling way:

1. Communicate through stories

Stories help bring your vision to life. People remember stories that are short, pithy truths. Telling stories builds a connection. They build trust and capture hearts and minds. Whether it's military - *no man left behind*, or healthcare - *eliminate blindness*.

Skillful communication is a matter of timing, pace and

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Insight in brief

Having a clear vision and communicating it is a prerequisite for CEOs.

Yet many growing company CEOs seem reticent or possibly slightly embarrassed about communicating their company vision in a disciplined way.

Through reflection, planning and practice, CEOs can communicate their vision and make a big impact on performance.

Insight in Action

1. Get feedback from others on your current vision, and how they believe you communicate it.

2. Carve out some time from urgent day-to-day matters. Plan an offsite with your

you'll confuse. Be clear about what needs to change, what needs to stay the same, and be clear about the timeframes involved.

Communicate the story and message at every opportunity. Get some of your team to start promoting the message. Coach them to tell the stories with a sense of pride and respect. Build trust through your actions to reinforce the narrative.

2. Make it personal - be authentic and make it real

Good CEOs have their teams involved in crafting their vision but the CEO is the chief communicator. Through repeated practice, distill the essence of what excites you about the vision into clear, twitter-like, sound bites that stick.

As CEO, dig deep into your values and beliefs to ensure you are clear why this vision is important to you. For others to follow, they need to trust you. Honesty distinguishes real communication. If they feel you are faking it, you will never make it.

Don't masquerade as a messenger from the future and try to come up with a vision on your own. Your job is to get all stakeholders aligned.

To convince them to follow you, connect with where your team are today. Let your team and others know and understand how you arrived at the shared vision.

Develop and give life to it through dialogue in multiple forms to instill shared meaning and purpose. Ask probing questions, seek feedback and be enthusiastic.

3. Remember your audience - think like a brand manager

Remember your team and staff will receive messages in different ways. Most will only be drawn to a vision that reflects their aspirations, hopes and dreams. Be able to walk in their shoes. Build relationships that allow you synthesize your vision and elevate it so that it touches on their needs.

Some will like visual 'big picture' stuff, others will need

help, to create a compelling vision.

3. Understand what might get in the way of your team buying into a new vision.

Plan actions to overcome possible resistance or apathy.

4. Create a communications campaign, designed to win over hearts, minds and bodies. Put urgency in it, and set some short-term basecamps to galvanise early success.

5. Regularly review progress on staff buy-in. Work relentlessly through listening to objectors and skeptics - winning them over one at a time.

by the right language and words. Prepare for, and welcome, resistance - better to have conflict, debate and real commitment, than a sham consensus. Your vision should motivate your team to take small steps, no matter how hesitant.

4. Connect to the big decisions - a vision without execution is hallucination

Make your vision a reality by connecting it to big decisions. Vision is always about change. No one wants change for change's sake, so it's critical to build the case for change.

Your shared vision will clarify expectations for both you, and your team. Make sure they understand their role in achieving that vision. Select a limited number of initiatives to provide focus and priorities to pursue.

Let your vision be seen as the purpose and signpost that keeps you on track. All team members should be able to see the vision reflected in your decisions. Make sure your team sees how results achieved are connected.

Let your vision demand and inspire extra effort and motivation from all.

5. Treat your vision like a religion - celebrate it

Consistency builds trust. Consider how a religion approaches it - regular weekly celebrations. Do something to remind your team where they are going, and celebrate every small win. Make it a regular thing, let it become a powerful force in shaping behaviour.

Illustrate your vision through metaphors, analogies and traditions. Communicate high expectations. Add an emotional appeal and sense of drama to provoke, influence and persuade. Build a common community in pursuit of a common good.

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