VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

How To Create A Vision

And

Make It Come Alive

By

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Introduction

The word “vision” stirs the emotions in most everyone. Visioning is a primary quality for leadership, both personal leadership and leading others. The ability to create a vision is an ingrained part of our human nature. Yet, some may think of a ‘vision’ as an unrealistic or ephemeral dream. Still others may find the idea of a vision intimidating. This article summarizes a visioning process that is credible, complete and reliable.

Visionary Leaders

The United States began its emergence as a world industrial leader during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Corporate leaders were successful because of their expert knowledge, inventiveness and innovation. We characterized these leaders as autocratic, forceful, driving and controlling. Their companies bore their names, such as Ford, Edison, Bell, Goodyear and Westinghouse. Their leadership transformed America and made a profound influence on others throughout the world. Innovators are still transforming America - Deming, Gates, Kroc, Walton, Steve Jobs and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg to name only a few. In the Catholic Church we could identify several popes, bishops, priests, religious and laity. All of the best leaders, past and present, share one thing in common –

Each had a vision.

A vision is a mental picture of the future as we intend it to be. A true vision is comprehensive and explains our ultimate goal – who we are and “whom” it is we want to become, “what” we want to accomplish and “why” we want to do it.

Once we have identified our vision clearly and succinctly, we are ready to craft and formulate a detailed strategic action plan that will make our vision a reality. The strategic planning process begins first by communicating our vision in a way that everyone will be able to see and understand our vision. A properly crafted vision captivates and inspires people. As a result, they are motivated and want to be a part of making the vision a reality.

Process

We are proposing a vision and a process that is complete and insures the formation of a detailed plan of action that will make the vision a reality. There are five steps in the process and each step in the process must be taken in an exact sequence.

Step 1. Purpose.

Purpose answers the questions“, who”, "why", and “what”? “Who” are we and "Why" were we formed? “Why” do we exist? “What” is our "reason for being?” and “What” is it that we are to accomplish? We answer these questions in "To…” responses. The Preamble of the Constitution is an excellent example of a Purpose statement -“... in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, etc.".

The purpose is the primary directive for each organization and every individual within the organization. The vision and all subsequent goals flow from the purpose. In an ecclesial
setting, spirituality, community and ministry are essential to our fundamental belief system. We will also want to review our purpose and our re-evaluate our actions periodically. If there is any incongruence, we first evaluate our purpose to insure it is still valid. If the purpose is still valid we will want to examine it carefully and insure that our plan of action is realistic and sufficient. If not, the purpose should be redefined.

**Step 2. Business Definition**

The business definition defines the nature of our work, "what" we do" and", the reason “why”. For example, a truck driver would use an industry perspective to explain, "I'm in trucking" or "I'm in transportation." In the Church we might say, “I’m in ministry”.

Next, we ask the question, “why do we work” All of us in some way are involved in the “customer need-satisfaction” business. In an ecclesial setting, a definition would relate to those whom we are ministering, in which case the questions may ask ourselves would be, “What are people expect from us? “What spiritual and human needs are we satisfying?"

Most people would define Walt Disney’s business in terms of amusement or entertainment. However, Walt Disney defined himself as in the "happiness" business. He would say, “We put smiles on people's faces." A subtle but an important perspective. “How would you define the “Church” in business terms?” “How would you define your own ministry?”

**Step 3. Values**

Our values are the concepts and principles that are most important to us. Values represent our philosophy and our belief system. Values relate to our purpose, our ministry and the goals of the church organization. Values guide everyone's actions.

Values are expressed in principles and practices that are spelled out and serve as a guide in our goal setting and decision-making, how we conduct ourselves and our relationships. Value statements serve to preserve and protect the integrity of the work we do. The identification and clarification of our values is an on-going process.

**Step 4. Visionary Goals**

Visionary goals are a summary collection of our ultimate goals on a grand scale. Visionary goals are ambitious and challenging. They inspire and excite. Visionary goals possess nobility that challenges us to dedicate and commit ourselves to their attainment. Like all goals, visionary goals should be clear in the mind as the sharpest pictures. Pictures are able to describe a personal photograph and tell the story behind it. In a similar manner, we should be able to describe and communicate our visionary goals.

**Step 5. Vision Statement**

The vision statement is a brief summary statement that captures the essence of our visionary goals in a few choice but descriptive words. A vision statement depicts what we ultimately are going to accomplish or where we eventually want to arrive. Examples are Henry Ford’s “Two cars in every garage”, Herbert Hoover's “A chicken in every pot” and the U.S. Army’s “Be all you can be”. And, Jesus at His last supper, “…that they all may be one, as you, Father, are in me
Step 5. Mission Statement
Whereas the vision statement describes the ultimate destination, the mission statement expresses the action required to make the vision a reality. The mission statement maintains the audacious spirit of the visionary goals and should be concise and clear to all who hear or reads it.

Finally, we summarize our mission in a concise one line statement that captures the essence and intent of our mission, connects with people and engages them. Brevity is a key. President Kennedy furnished us an example of a mission statement in 1961 when he keynoted the moon mission: "This nation should dedicate itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to Earth.". Other examples are Edison's "Light every city. Electrify every home." Bill Gates', "Make computers affordable and usable by everyone". Saint John Neumann’s, “Bring all souls to Christ.” and the Passionist Fathers, “We preach Christ and Him Crucified.”

Both the vision statement and the mission statement should be publicized in every way and as often as possible: in print, in our writings, our Sunday bulletins, sermons and conversations. We can also publish a detailed explanation of our vision and mission in a small booklet, a brief article a few paragraphs or a one page summary.

Importance of a Vision and a Mission
Achieving success is a continuing process. No individual or organization can fully succeed without an understanding of why we exist, the business in which we are engaged, a clearly defined vision, a mission statement and a carefully crafted plan of action that will result in the vision becoming a reality.

In Summary
A vision is a mental picture of the future as we intend it to be. A leader’s degree of success is directly related to the leader’s ability to create a vision and communicate their vision in a way others can see the vision, understand the vision, identify with the vision and want to be a part of making the vision a reality. A clearly defined vision is the source from which all subsequent goals flow. In the absence of these components, mediocrity and eventual failure are inevitable.

The best leaders share the ownership of their vision with others. They empower people and include them as an integral part in developing and executing a plan of action that will insure the vision becomes and remains a reality.

In times past, visioning has received minimal attention. Times have changed. So have the requirements of leadership. With a clearly defined vision, a mission, a detailed plan of action, faith and determination, everything is possible.