



WHAT IS A VISIONARY?

One of the most important attributes for a leader is a simple concept, quite often ignored: he/she must lead, not simply manage. Companies are often well-managed, but poorly led, the CEOs and executives committing all their time to policy direction, crisis management, or routine matters, rather than thinking about the company's direction and future outcomes.

The talents of a leader should not be devoted exclusively to day to day management, but to the 'bigger picture'. The significance of a visionary leader is one who not only thinks about, but also develops a company vision, and does so in an original and innovative way.

Intuition is critical in order to develop an efficient and lasting company vision and direction, as well as in everyday management decisions; Maisbitt and Aburdene state that 'the leader who would create a vision sufficiently compelling to motivate associates to superior performances must draw on the intuitive mind'. Ed McCracken, CEO of Silicon Graphics, says that 'The mind, when it is quiet, delivers up phenomenal intuition which can then be focused to design a next-generation product or to understand what's driving particular customers.'

These intuitive abilities must be balanced with first-hand experience, knowledge, and analytical skills, allowing a leader to use all available resources to come to the best conclusion about any given situation or decision.

Still, to be an effective visionary, more than just intuitive ability and knowledge is required; you also need perseverance, confidence, integrity and strength.

People with high visionary abilities, or who are creatively-minded, are often stifled in the lower levels of corporations; they are made to follow orders without any independent thought and contribution. They have to deal with many levels of non-creative and non-visionary managers.

Visionaries must have complete confidence in their abilities and how they may be used for the greatest benefit. Decision-making involves more than simple reliance on hard data and visionaries must be willing to sometimes go against the available information and stick with their 'gut-feeling'.

Consequently, those that do survive to become high-level visionaries must be thick-skinned enough to survive the lower rungs of the corporation with their skills intact, confident enough to believe in their abilities and their practical applications. Walt Disney said 'If you can dream it, you can do it', but only if you have this confidence and perseverance.

WHY DO COMPANIES NEED VISION?

Inspiration, Participation, the Future.

Companies need 'vision' for this simple reason: most business failures are failures of vision. Without vision you have no goal to work towards, no direction in which to organize the resources at your command.

Over the next 20-30 years at least 50% of the world's large corporations will disappear completely or will not be the same business as they are today. Those corporations that disappear will do so due to lack of vision of their business, in relation to a rapidly changing unknown future world.

A clear and empowering vision is the first step to success. To form a vision can be as straight-forward, as asking 'why do we exist?', where are we going and why? Or just simply imagining the ideal future for the company. Visioning is about internalising the direction of the business and imagining it creating that reality.

Visions allow leaders to create their own reality, not simply react to it. With an ultimate goal in mind, short-term setbacks become less important. Japanese corporations often have 20 or 50 year plans and do not face as much pressure to show quarterly profit returns as well as annual asset growth; barriers are challenges rather than obstacles.

Visions allow workers to be part of the bigger picture and to understand their contribution. Vision can illustrate the difference between short-term means and long-term goals: when asked what s/he is doing, one builder may reply 'cutting stone' whilst another replies 'building a cathedral'. Both are accurate, but both are vastly different answers.

In order to attain company goals, leaders need to develop and sustain a bigger intention and vision. If a goal is too easy and reachable, there will be no growth or development in leaders, staff or the business. Growth comes from stretching to achieve things you could not previously achieve.

Henry Moore sums it up well when he says: 'The secret of life is to have a task, something you devote your entire life to...and the most important thing is- it must be something you cannot possibly do.' Only this will ensure continuous interest, growth and development.

WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE VISION?

Visionary leaders act as a catalyst and facilitator of purpose, mission and vision, and can help to achieve things otherwise impossible. Individuals were crucial in some of the most important events of the century: Kennedy and the moon landing; Churchill and WWII. Company 'vision', however, is not an isolated concept, and must be supported by balanced purpose and mission.

Purpose

Purpose is the most important thing in life, and in attaining company goals. Without a clear sense of purpose there will be many distractions on the road to achievement. Rather than 'keeping your options open' you may be limiting the extent of your achievements.

Purpose is the underlying reason for the existence of a business or organization. To be effective it must reflect the core values and beliefs of its individual components, its employees and executives.

There is both overall purpose and everyday purpose and they are both important. An effective visionary leader knows how to connect routine, everyday purpose with the overall company purpose, creating harmony.

Overall company purpose is something that is continually being worked towards and altered; it can never simply be 'done'. Short and intermediate goals can be achieved, but the ultimate purpose must be something that can be satisfactorily worked towards, but never fully completed.

Mission

Mission is more specific, more precise and definable than purpose. It can be clearly stated and used as a motivational point of focus. It often incorporates something like a clear and succinct slogan, summing up the specific goal that a company wishes to achieve in the foreseeable future. One of Pepsi's mission statements was/is 'Beat Coke': two simple words that sum up the goals of a huge corporation.

Mission, unlike company purpose, is often achieved and can be altered without much trouble. To formulate a new mission, the company purpose must be utilized, hence the need for purpose to be broad and creative enough to formulate new and

innovative missions.

Vision

Vision itself is much more creative and intuitive than any company vision or purpose could be: it is the basic concept from which a company is formed. It is the ability to see the potential of opportunities that are right in front of everyone's eyes, but very rarely seen.

Visionary leadership means keeping eyes, ears, mind and heart open, and having the passion and courage to implement those ideas. It is not analytic but intuitive, and visionary leaders with confidence and ability use their visions to develop absolutely ground-breaking and innovative products and companies.

When Sony Corporation was considering the Walkman in 1978 there was no history to help them, no research to indicate this new product would be accepted by the consumer market. A group of Sony engineers had failed to create a portable tape recorder, ending up with a product that played tapes but had no recording ability. Masaru Ibuka, the founder of Sony; made an intuitive leap that paired the 'failed' project with another project working to develop lightweight portable headphones. Nothing like this had ever been done before - everyone expected tape players to have the dual function of recording. Nevertheless, paired with an unconventional marketing approach, Sony was gifted with one of its greatest successes: no-one could have logically predicted from the early 'failed' project how much of a popular success it would become. The Sony Walkman, was the predecessor of a new era in portable audio technologies.

VISION DEVELOPMENT

Visions do not have to be long, complex, detailed plans. They are a statement of intention, not specifics. Coca-Cola has many concise and yet inspiring slogans: 'One world, one taste' and 'A Coke within arm's reach of everyone in the world'. They provide both company aim and inspirational concepts.

Vision and intentions must be broad and encompassing not only in the sense of time and long-term goals, but also in their wholeness and unity with the world at large. Visions incorporating a holistic picture of the business and its mission to all stakeholders, achieve much more support from employees, management, community and customers.

Another important point to consider is focus. As Nikos Kazantzakis says 'by believing passionately in something that still does not exist, we create it'. Although we can achieve anything, it often is a challenge to achieve everything. Visions need to be narrowed and refined to what is really desired most; they may be broad, but should not include superfluous goals.

Surpassing Limited Perceptions

Successful visionaries are able to look outside the square, creating effective and innovative visions that aren't limited by any 'common' perceptions. Eleanor Roosevelt said 'You must always do the thing you think you cannot do.'

They know that a personal interpretation of reality is not the same as reality itself. Nothing is the way it 'is', our world-view is relative and ever-changing. Things that were thought beyond the realms of possibility a few decades ago are now part of everyday life. 'Is' may describe what is common thought at the time, but does not ultimately describe reality. Even rules as seemingly incontestable as Newton's laws of physics were altered by the advent of Quantum Physics. In the corporate world, the visionaries that stand out are those that have the courage to follow their instincts and dreams, despite being out of sync with consensus reality.

Another word that leads to limitation and misconception is 'because': We think we know the reasons for something and hence eliminate all alternatives. Assumptions like this have led to widespread oppression throughout history, with views such as 'women cannot reason and govern because they are too emotional'. It can be used as an excuse by people who do not want to reveal or face the truth. The statement given after 'because' may be the most apparent reason, but it may not be the true one.

To develop an original and effective vision, every leader should examine their thoughts and behaviours, taking nothing for granted. It is important to conquer fear, which produce excuses such as: 'oh I can't start a business, the market isn't right for it' - is that the real the reason, or is it fear? Feelings such as guilt and unworthiness hamper every human being. Fear of looking foolish, or failing are often the reasons many leaders fail to achieve their or their business's full potential.

The dominant human fear is fear of the unknown, and it can severely limit the ability to open up to intuition. When we fear the unknown, what we fear most is opening up to our true personal power, and the responsibility and emotion that can come with increased authority. Big commitments mean big wins and/or big losses. The courageous visionary moves outside the influence of fear because he/she can sense the excitement and the 'rightness' of their direction and choices.

Innovative visionary leaders look into the future and can often see probabilities that appear radical and different, based on today's understanding and reality. It requires courage to put aside the perceptions and opinions of others about a vision; often - the better the idea, the more likely it will stir up resistance.

History is full of stories around ideas that were new and different. Many visionaries were sacrificed at the altar of the 'Status Quo'. Our culture is one that fears and resists change. Had it not been for the visions of those men and women; the courage and persistence to make their visions a reality; despite resistance to change, humanity would have made little evolutionary or technological progress.

FURTHER VISIONARY AND INTUITIVE LEADERSHIP SKILLS

The skills that visionaries need are many and varied. As previously stated, in addition to being highly intuitive they must also be motivated and confident in their own abilities. But these are all personal skills, and although they can help individuals in their career path, visionaries cannot sponsor change unless they also possess the ability to inspire others, and to communicate their dreams

Visionary leaders must communicate their vision so that it is passed on accurately and consistently. It is important that all individuals in a company resonate with, and become committed towards the same vision. All it takes is one person who doesn't understand, or doesn't want to cooperate, to ruin a project or vision. A leader's intention must be clear, by making purpose and vision known in one simple sentence, and acting on that vision themselves.

Intention comes before vision, and works with it to inspire people. Inspirational leaders know how to use intention, so their words and actions bring forward inspiration and visionary thinking in their colleagues.

The blind obedience often required in current corporate systems limit original ideas; original and visionary thinking can be nurtured by developing a culture of value adding visions at all levels of the company, in response to internal and external needs for change...To achieve this, individuals must of course be trained in intuition and allow their creativity free reign.

After a vision is accurately communicated, a leader must ensure that employees are committed. When individuals aren't committed, productivity and communication is poor, hampering company operations, growth and profit. Unfortunately many businesses still foster non-commitment, non-communication and apathy. People working only for their pay-packet and with no real enthusiasm or commitment.

Visionary leaders value the creative and net worth of all their employees, at all levels in the organisation. These leaders provide the environment, culture, nurturing conditions, integrity and joint visions which foster innovation, commitment, loyalty, personal empowerment and growth, which produce the fruits of company growth and consistent profits.

To keep people committed, integrity is critical. Nothing deflates commitment quicker than broken agreements on the part of leaders - one broken promise can erode a great deal of trust.

WHAT CAN VISIONARIES ACHIEVE?

Company vision allows creativity, collaboration in problem-solving, goal-setting, and personal growth, but it can also increase profit exponentially. The profits of one division of Amex Life Insurance increased 700% when President Sarah Nolan allowed the employees themselves to develop a new office and application layout. Employees were empowered, felt their contribution mattered, and worked together in teams.

The old business paradigm, over-dependant on logic and rationality, based on scarcity and adversarial competition has brought much of the planet to the edge of disaster. It exploits limited resources and individuals, churning through and consuming them for the sake of short-term profit.

Intuitive management and a visionary leadership style allows everyone to contribute under the guiding hand of a leader/coordinator. A truly great leader not only fosters the vision, but also creates other visionary leaders. An organisation in the hands of such people does not exist purely for short-term financial results, but endorses social and planetary responsibility as well as the philosophy that we all one and that everything is interconnected.

