

Communicate a 'Sticky' Vision

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Quick—what's the one thing a leader can't delegate?

Maybe there's more than one answer. I think it's communicating the organization's vision. One of the leader's primary roles is "pathfinder," communicating a vision of "what could be."

Closely linked with that role is the responsibility of aligning people and other resources with the desired future of the organization. What are some criteria for evaluating your effectiveness in gaining alignment through your vision casting?

For your communication to be useful and lasting, you have to succeed in having people:

- pay attention to your message
- understand and remember the vision
- agree with and believe in the vision
- care about the vision
- act on the vision

For many leaders, this seems a formidable task. Ah, but I recommend to you *Made to Stick*, a book by brothers Chip and Dan Heath that offers clear, enjoyable guidance for making that happen.

Generating a memorable ("sticky") vision is not natural or instinctive—it requires diligence and awareness. Let's consider a good example of an unforgettable vision.

"I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth."

Did Americans understand President John Kennedy's 1961 response to the Soviet's advantage in the space race? Once over their surprise, did they agree with, believe in, and care about this opportunity? Clearly, thousands of engineers and other scientists enthusiastically acted to bring this vision to fruition! And on July 21, 1969, Americans celebrated.

The Heath brothers thoroughly explore guidelines for "sticky" ideas in their entertaining, example-filled book. Here is a brief introduction to their six principles.

Simple. Define the core message you want remembered. Prioritize. Edit. Express one profound idea only—sharing multiple concepts makes none of them memorable. Use plain talk.

Unexpected. Kennedy's pronouncement was certainly not anticipated. How could such an achievement possibly occur? The technology was not yet known. Audacious and provocative, Kennedy engaged our collective curiosity.

Concrete. Leaders spend a lot of time thinking about "what could be." The Heath brothers imagine that Kennedy might have said, "We will become the international leader in the space industry through maximum team-centered innovation and strategically targeted aerospace initiatives." People in your organization need explicit, tangible descriptions to which they can personally relate, like, "To the moon and back!"

Credible. What do people believe? Personal experiences. Verifiable details. Honest and trustworthy authorities. Delivered with conviction, the President told us that the greatest nation on earth could figure out this mystery. We believed him!

Emotional. This is perhaps the strongest factor in sharing any leader's vision. People have to care before they'll take action! Americans are "can do" people, and they sure didn't want the greatest technological advances in the world to go to the Russians!

Stories. Jesus told stories; Aesop told stories; your parents told you bedtime stories. Kennedy's story, "Land on the moon and return safely," transformed science fiction into possibility. He gave Americans permission to be inspired—and inspired we were!

Inspire your organization with "sticky" vision stories. Are you not creative? Not a problem. You need not generate your vision stories, because the world will deliver them to you. Your task is to be open and aware. When the story appears, you recognize the opportunity to apply them to your situation. I'll share more about that thought next week!

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