

Why is Articulating Your Vision So Valuable?

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After I distributed my article on how to articulate a personal vision, a reader asked, "Why is articulating my vision so valuable? I know what I want; why should I make the effort to express it in such a way that you or others can understand what I want? Even if folks care, what are they going to do to help me improve? Won't the changes I want to make have to come from me?"

The biggest and perhaps the most obvious reason for articulating your vision is that others do care about your success, and some of them would love to help you. I'm one of those people. I can't help you achieve what you want unless I understand it. You want to build your leadership skills. By generating a written vision of "what could be" for you in a year, you offer me a guide on how to support you.

Your direct reports, some of your colleagues, and hopefully your boss want to help you improve, too. If you share with them what you want to accomplish, they'll be more engaged, willing, and able to support you.

Maybe an example will help. I recently worked with a competent individual who focused on improving her delegation skills. She admitted she had perfectionistic tendencies, so she usually handled most responsibilities herself. Though she trusted others to do their work, she never expected them to accomplish the tasks as thoroughly as she would.

Also, if she tried to delegate, she tended to overmanage the individual, following up too frequently and providing directions far too specific for what should be done next.

She realized she could help herself and those under her authority if she could modify her habitual behaviors. I assured her that she didn't need to know the "how" to make that transition; I would help her with the specific methods. She just needed to clearly describe what she wanted--several months into the future--to be true for her.

Here are the statements she generated to describe her future perceptions and behaviors:

- I spend time with my direct reports discussing their career goals, their abilities, and their preferences in assignments. I affirm where they are strong in meeting their responsibilities, and I compliment their commitment. I communicate my appreciation for each individual as an important and unique member of our team.
- I seek my direct reports' input to develop a strategy that the team supports and expects to execute.
- I trust my direct reports with important tasks and assignments. I give them clear expectations and guidance, then step back and let them complete the assignment, knowing I'm available if they want my support or assistance.
- I make a point of genuinely acknowledging and celebrating my direct reports' success, and I use those successes as stepping stones to further development.
- I maintain a genuine open-door policy with my direct reports, so they feel comfortable coming to me with questions and concerns to increase their likelihood of success and accomplishment.

Before I even helped this leader look at possible alternative behaviors, her awareness was heightened. She stopped some of her harmful behaviors just from realizing their effects.

She was inspired to find alternative behaviors leading to better habits. Though a bit skeptical that she could make much improvement, she was willing to experiment and ask for feedback from her colleagues, direct reports, and me.

In receiving conflicting feedback, she realized that she needed to deal with each person uniquely. She could count on some people to handle certain tasks. With others, she needed to be more cautious.

The more open she was to exploring what worked and what got in her way, the more her boss and I could help her recognize obstacles and creatively generate ways to overcome them. Using a variety of resources I recommended, she generated a leadership development plan that stretched her to experiment with new approaches.

Each time I met with her, I asked, "When was the last time you read your vision statements aloud?" If the answer was more than a couple of days, I'd ask her to read her statements to me again, using as much passion as she could muster. Each time, she became freshly inspired because she knew she'd not made the progress she sought.

The demands of everyday life wear us down. Though we want to improve, dealing with the daily grind takes our focus off what is possible. Once you've articulated your vision of "what could be" (and what you want), however, you can intentionally pause, reflect, and energize yourself again to pursue your improved future self.

I would ask her, "What are you willing to do to move in the direction of your vision between now and when we next meet?" She'd identify two or three very specific action steps, more challenging than she'd adopted on her own. I promised to ask about her success when we next talked. Her reports were typically quite favorable.

You won't know how many people are willing to help you until you ask! You are blessed if you have a coach, mentor, or even a friend who has committed to helping you build your skills. Please diligently think about and take the time to articulate your vision of the improved "you." That articulation will immensely help them help you!