

The Power of Visioning

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I've helped leaders build organizational visions for almost twenty years. In the past two weeks, I was privileged to support the leaders and employees of four different companies as they built mission and vision statements for their companies.

A powerful coalescing occurs when committed individuals come together after some months or years of successful operation and articulate the concepts they've had in mind since they "signed on."

Most people have experience with visioning, even if they've never used that term to describe it. If you've thought about buying a home or a car, marrying and having a family, or obtaining a driver's license, you've created a vision for yourself. "Visioning" is the creation of a mental image of the ideal future or dream you are committed to achieve.

Articulating an organizational vision is much more difficult than generating a personal vision. A personal vision requires only the thoughts of a single individual. We do it all the time, often not even committing the thoughts to writing. When two or more individuals collaborate on formulating a shared vision, however, they now have the demanding challenge of wordsmithing!

Words are symbols. Words represent concepts, and each word holds different meanings for each individual. As I work with groups to generate vision statements, they often are able to agree quickly on the main concepts to be included. The difficult and time-consuming piece comes at the end when the participants have to join the ideas together into an intelligible description.

With persistence, however, most groups are able to craft a picture of a future state that they enthusiastically support. The process itself is invigorating. I advocate having as many people in an organization as possible participate in the visioning process.

You see, there are actually two objectives in any visioning process. The first and obvious objective is the creation of a product—a document that people can reference, perhaps during team planning meetings, perhaps in recruiting new members to the team.

The second, but often the more important objective, is enrolling members of the team in the vision. To accomplish a challenging vision, each member must volunteer his or her commitment and unique skills. When leaders generate a vision statement in isolation, engaging team members is difficult. The process feels a lot like selling, and sometimes team members are unwilling buyers. I've seen too many well-meaning leaders generate vision statements that never caught on with the team members and wound up lying dormant in a file drawer.

However, when the team members generate the vision themselves, the very act of creation stimulates the participants, and the energy that develops in the process is contagious and sustainable. People often refer back to the experience of generating the vision with fond memories, realizing the privilege of having participated in a historic turning point in the organization's success.

The individuals involved in your organization work every day with some future objective in mind, whether articulated or not. Taking the time to consciously consider options and agree on a desired future destination generates alignment, focus, and passion. As a leader, you are responsible for creating an environment where each individual is inspired to apply his or her unique abilities. Is it time to take a fresh look at your organizational vision—or maybe generate one for the first time?

What questions do you have about leadership development? Call me at (478)-988-0237 or send an e-mail to dhooper2@juno.com.