

## **“Show Us Clearly, Oh Leader!”**

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I was talking with one of my clients who recently conducted a self-assessment of his strengths and limitations relative to the many attributes of a leader. He judged that one of his strengths was “dealing with ambiguity.”

I remarked that I find few leaders at his organizational level who can identify “dealing with ambiguity” as one of their top strengths. Knowing him as I do, however, I am not surprised at his evaluation. He is highly respected for his technical knowledge. He has helped many new employees quickly develop expertise because of his ability to make difficult concepts clear and understandable.

**Why is clarity so important?** Life in organizations, be they families or businesses or non-profits, is rarely static. The many changes thrust upon an organization creates uncertainty. Few leaders are able to collect all the facts they’d like to have when making decisions.

Those under your authority are probably somewhat anxious about the future. How will we overcome all the obstacles in our path? How will technology change what we do? Will we survive the competition? Will we have a job a year from now?

The clearer you can answer these questions, the more confident those under your authority will be, freeing them to be creative, resilient, and persistent.

**What needs to be clear?** Every individual must know whom he or she serves. For most employees, some other employee is an internal customer. Some employees, however, serve the paying customer. The organization must know what market segment it reaches.

Every individual must know the organization’s core strength. Weaknesses become irrelevant if the strengths are known and promoted. Toyota makes the most reliable cars (not the most stylish or best performing). Walgreens offers the greatest convenience for drugstore users— able to fill your prescription at any of its many stores, most open all night. Apple invents cool technology that is simple to use.

Every individual must know how success is measured, both personally and for the organization. By knowing what actions lead to these successful outcomes, people are more confident and tenacious. They engage without hesitation, seeking to overcome obstacles and prevent problems.

Every individual must understand and embrace the future vision. Current reality is so pervasive that without clarity and repetition of “what could be,” people lose hope. Leaders must continually speak of what’s ahead, or resilience and persistence will fade.

**How do leaders achieve clarity?** They take time to reflect. They get away from the daily action and think, processing what has happened and what might happen. They seek to understand what is and isn’t working and why. They analyze differences and draw conclusions, then come back and test them with their colleagues.

They choose carefully which employee’s performance they celebrate. Every organization has its heroes. When you publicly praise an employee’s behavior, it not only affirms that individual. Others are watching, and your recognition has significant impact. Use it as an opportunity to identify what was done, who was served, and how it moved the organization in the direction of the vision.

They practice the words and stories they use to describe who is served, the capacities of the organization, and how success is measured. They experiment with presenting the images that identify the desired future state.

Leaders who can make the ambiguous clear will be rewarded by individuals who diligently work to make the organization’s better future come true!

[This article uses concepts contained in *The One Thing You Need to Know*, by Marcus Buckingham.]

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**Dennis Hooper is a certified coach who installs leadership development systems. E-mail him at [dhooper2@juno.com](mailto:dhooper2@juno.com) or phone him at 478-988-0237.**