



Got Vision?

If you want to know the future, look at what you're doing in the present.
- Tibetan Saying

Vision is not a poster on the wall or a catchy tag line in your marketing materials. It's a collective mindset reflecting your organization's most important intention - what it aspires to achieve. Shared vision unifies current efforts in service to strategic goals, inspiring employees to make better decisions and collaborate to achieve success. It changes up your future—with intention and inspiration.

When you don't have shared vision you pay a price. Heard any of these phrases lately?

*Flavor of the month...Can't get traction...Our leaders don't get it...
We're not consulted...Too many priorities...We manage by fire drill...
We're all really busy but not sure what it's adding up to*

Maybe your last employee survey or recent water cooler conversations have fed back some of these thoughts, a sense of employees not being engaged, not willing or able to ramp up their discretionary effort to win the day.

Our research and field experience confirms the work of many others; those who experience shared vision achieve great things, enjoying the ride as well as the destination. When you "got vision", smart work happens, results ramp up, excitement is contagious, people commit.

What is shared vision?

Too often, developing a vision is a check-the-box activity in a strategic planning or reorganization exercise. Or it may be the inspiration of a key leader or leadership team defining the future for an organization. Neither of these common scenarios will lead to the collective effort, passion, and results that organizational vision can help achieve.

Shared Vision: Four defining hallmarks

Clear Picture – Not a vague aspiration, subject to endless individual interpretations, or interchangeable with other organizations, vision presents a concrete view easily explained in a 30-second elevator ride.

Future Success – Not stuck in the here and now, vision has a bold sense of what could be possible, painting a picture of a compelling tomorrow worth the extra effort.

Widely Owned – Rather than a top-down mandate or a solution owned by a small group of champions, shared vision is internalized and enriched by those whose actions will make it come true.

Personally Felt – Not focused on a future more important to market analysts than employees and customers, a sustainable shared vision makes a powerful connection to the heart as well as the head.

How well does your vision meet ALL four defining hallmarks?

Do you have a clear picture of future success that is widely owned and personally felt?

If not, where is your vision blocked?

Is Your Vision Blocked?

If shared vision is so important, why don't we all have more of it? We've found five common reasons that, despite the best intent, vision doesn't click in an organization. See if you can relate to one (or more!) of these challenges.

Vision Blockers: The Five Patterns



Vision is Stuck at the Top

The senior leader or leadership team has a pretty clear picture of where the organization needs to go. *"That's the job of leadership, right? Setting the direction so that everyone can get the job done....Why don't I see the results I expect?"* Problem is that the picture isn't clear to others – and has not been refined by those closest to the customer.

Yes, the leader has broad perspective and insights that are critical to the vision. But the vision has to be meaningful and inspiring to every person in the organization to gain their commitment and leverage their talents. The remedy? Give up "vision control". Let people shape and internalize the vision so that it becomes *their* vision - not just *your* vision.



Vision is Caught in the Middle

Ever work on a mission-critical project where you and your colleagues were reading from the same playbook? Maybe it was a task force or project team. Everyone worked hard to address a challenge, factor in diverse views, and achieve thoughtful, energizing results. Yet as you move out of your own circle, you don't find the rest of the organization jumping on board. Your team wonders.... *"What's with these people? Can't they see how our ideas will make a positive difference? Why are they holding us back?!"* People have a way of derailing effort that doesn't resonate with their own, ingrained picture.

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It's easy for those working closely on a project to get out ahead of everyone else, often without realizing it. A key to success is working early and often to spread ownership and connect more people to the vision. Though it may feel slower up front to invest this time and effort, you will actually move further faster in the end, with big payoffs for all.



Vision is Not Linked & Synched

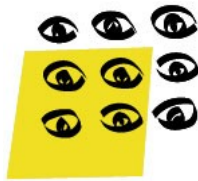
It's a common scenario in any organization with more than one function or team. Each group works to clarify its purpose and priorities. Good exercise and well intended, but often, it goes awry when the separate visions aren't "linked and synched" as part of a collective vision. Disconnects lead to redundancies, inconsistent decisions and even turf wars as groups vie for the scarce resources of the business. The key here is to

create a big enough picture of the future for all groups to join, creating natural integration and powerful partnerships.



Vision is Vague

Some organizations have become so busy with activity, so caught up in an “execute” mode that they haven’t taken collective time to reflect. “*No time for think, just do! Too much going on...got to keep moving.*” Don’t confuse activity with impact! You risk spending scarce time, money and talent on the wrong things. And there’s a good chance that the lack of clarity and wasted energy are frustrating your staff and giving an edge to your competition. The fix is to structure time to think about and commit to a compelling future – and to do so without compromising your ability to execute. A powerful organizing thought about your future will actually streamline activity – as it prepares your organization for the next big thing.



Vision is Dated

Why refresh your vision when constancy of purpose means so much? In fast-moving times, even the best ideas of a flawless future state demand an ongoing reality test. Maybe your markets have shifted, your staff has grown or you have recently merged, divested or acquired. Vision is a living therefore changing proposition. Key here is taking the time to refresh the vision to make sure that the target once imagined is still held. The process may end up affirming the purpose or it may yield a modification. Either outcome ensures that your focus is sound.

What Next?

Wherever you sit in the organization, you can take a step to building a shared vision. When done right, it is an inspiring process that leads to results. Here are some concrete steps to get you started:

Figure out what’s holding you back. How well are you meeting all four shared vision hallmarks? Which of the five vision blockers is tripping you up? What consequences do you notice?

Bring a group of influencers together. Make a plan to refresh, renew or re-state your intentions.

Enroll a range of voices into the conversation. Get key stakeholders - employees, customers, investors – in a collective conversation about your future.

Enjoy the ride!

*Your future is whatever you make it,
so make it a good one.*

Doc Brown to Marty McFly
in Back to the Future III