

Practical Exercises to Create a Vision that Lifts and Stretches



In our resource '7 steps to a vision that lifts and stretches' we offered seven, straightforward steps to arm you with a comprehensive guide to creating a vision which can stimulate the leadership team, build confidence and motivate people.

What is a vision? It's a picture of what success will be at a particular time in the future.

Today, we offer practical exercises that support key steps of creating the vision (see the graphic for the steps). These can help you make your vision real and punchy.

Also, since moving the vision from concept to day-to-day practice takes effort and engagement, we add some ways to engage your people in making the vision a reality.

Make the Vision Vivid (step 5 above)

Exercise: Create a Metaphor

This exercise brings a sense of shared purpose and creativity as the team share metaphors for success to thread into the vision. Metaphors stimulate the visual cortex of the brain and add emotional resonance.

There are several ways of doing this. Allow up to an hour.

a. Magazines

Take a collection of magazines, scissors, and glue.

Each person in the team collects images from the magazines that relate to the team's Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal (BHAG) and makes a collage on a flip-chart page.

You may find people hesitate at first, but really get into this once they get going. Take at least 20 minutes, then put the collages on the wall and share ideas.

b. Key words

Discuss the BHAG in pairs then each person draws a representation.

The pairs share and someone captures key words/ phrases that stood out as each person spoke. See what metaphors create excitement and use the most powerful and relevant in your vision.

c. Core purpose

A slightly longer option we used, led to the vision of a leadership team in Research and Data Analytics.

'To be a beacon, illuminating & energizing the thinking of our Customers, ourselves and our team' The steps are:

Each person in the team considers the question

'What is our core purpose – why do we exist as a team and how do we want to make a difference?'

(You can add stimulus by viewing Simon Sinek's TED talk "How Great Leaders Inspire Action")

Team members discuss answers to the question with a partner, giving each person 3 uninterrupted minutes in a Thinking Pair – see our article on How to Cultivate Shared Airtime in Teams to help you with this.

Each person draws their representation (no need to be an artist – but using images rather than words), shares their picture and team members play back what stood out.

Take the most powerful images and metaphors and enrich to give a vividness in the vision which also reflects the team's answers to the purpose question.

Know What You're Building On (Step 6 above)

Exercise: To help you find the raw material for past successes that give reasons to believe the vision can be achieved, the leader and leadership team can:

a. Success Gallery

Go back over the last couple of years. Remember your people's successes. Imagine walking down a corridor with many empty picture frames: put a success story into each one. Now list all the successes you put up and choose the stand-out three.

Or:

b. Stacking Success

Take two minutes only for each person to write a list of positive achievements that seem relevant. You might include contributions that people have made to past successes or skills, techniques and resources that could be assets in achieving the vision. Share, synthesise and again, choose the stand-outs.

Draft and Refine (Step 7)

Exercise: When the leader or team share their drafts of the vision, get feedback from each other on 'What works' and 'What could be even better, if...' against three criteria:

- Clarity of content?
- How engaged and motivated am I by the vision?
- How authentic are we in delivering it?

Iterate until you have a robust version that takes no longer than two minutes to speak out loud, probably closer to a minute and a half – great visions follow Franklin D. Roosevelt's fine advice to 'Be sincere; be brief; be seated'.

This will be around 300 words since we speak at around three words a second.

Share and Create the Future

When a leader or leadership team creates their vision, they've invested time in exploring it together and it has energy for them. Simply sharing it may lead to cynicism (and it's disastrous to 'cascade' it by email). For the vision to live, the wider team need to engage and have time to make sense of it.

Here are some approaches we've found useful:

- **Share the vision live** (or live on video) and allow members of the leadership team to share their own succinct personal example of what this means to them and how they see it show up in the team/ organisation. This demonstrates commitment, brings the vision to life, and helps wider team members see beyond the words.

- **Create time for breakout groups.** Ask sub-teams to come together or mix teams up if you want to break down silos and stimulate cross functional working.
 - **Invite people to find a partner and offer a question** such as “What does this vision mean to you, how far does your version of the future fit with it?”
 - **Give them 2 or 3 minutes each to respond to the question** in a thinking pair (see above) then come back together in small groups. Ask what does and doesn’t chime with them, how they might support and/or sabotage the vision and what it would need from everyone in day-to-day practice for the vision to have life.

Remember: no vision lives unless it’s revisited regularly. A simple exercise for a team meeting is to share the vision, test how well the team is living it on a scale of 1-10 and explore then detail what it will take to take it up a notch.

Richard Spence

References:

For more Visionary Leadership see:

Primal Leadership (2002), Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee

Leadership That Gets Results, Daniel Goleman (Harvard Business Review, March – April 2000) For more on BHAGs see:

https://www.jimcollins.com/article_topics/articles/BHAG.html

Built to Last (1994), James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras

For more fresh thinking, resources and practical tools visit <https://eye2eyedev.com/resources/>

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