

Visioning

How can participants use visioning techniques to become better leaders?

Topic: Visioning, reflection, project planning, personal development

Summary: Action and progress begin with a vision, and an excellent example of this is the “I Have a Dream” speech by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Visioning is an indispensable skill for leaders to have, as individuals and as members of a team. It’s an early step toward getting things done.

Outcomes:

Participants learn about the value of visioning in leadership and project planning.

Participants learn a shared visioning and an individual reflection/vision process.

Participants take home a vision statement for a project or a personal challenge they are working on.

Optional: Participants are able to discuss visioning with others and lead others through this or similar activities.

Duration: Two hours

Materials: Participant handouts

Background: There are several participant handouts that relate to visioning. Before you facilitate this session, become familiar with the information contained in these handouts, as well as other visioning resources that you may have available to you.

Are your participants working together on a project? Are they working on individual projects? Is the main goal of the session to provide personal development? How you answer these questions will guide how you proceed.

Procedure:

Warm-Up:

1. Establish the desired outcome of the session. This can include:
 - a. Creating a shared vision statement for a team project.
 - b. Creating vision statements for individual projects, service oriented or personal
 - c. Learning about the nature of visioning without a set goal in mind.
2. Introduce a definition of vision to the group as it applies to leadership, project planning, and personal development. Handout 1 includes several definitions and anecdote. You may use these or share examples from your personal experience.

The Activity:

1. Give participants 15 minutes or so to jot down their answers to the questions on Handout 2. This lays the groundwork for the processes that follow. It's advised that these not be shared so that participants can write personal responses without considering what others might think.
2. Ask participants to consider a project they are planning. If the participants are beginning to work together on a project, ask a few of them to describe it. If they are working on individual projects, have participants briefly describe what they might be working on. You can choose to let participants not consider a service project but rather a personal challenge they would like to work on.
3. Next, give participants 15 minutes or so to fill out their responses to the questions on Handout 3. Unlike Handout 3, participants may share their responses on Handout 3 if they wish and depending upon the group's objectives. Decide this ahead of time and let participants know.
4. There are two options for this step:
 - a.) If your participants are working together planning a project, have them engage in a facilitated discussion with the goal of arriving at a shared vision statement for the project. Handout 4 offers several considerations for this process.
 - b.) If participants are working on individual projects, have them take a few moments writing a draft vision statement. In small groups of two or three participants, ask them to share their statements and give each other feedback. Handout 4 offers several considerations for this process.

The Activity, Part 2: Sixteen Squares

1. The next phase of the session guides participants through the "Sixteen Squares" personal visioning activity.
2. Ask participants to take a sheet of 8.5" x 11" paper and fold it in half. Then fold it in half again and again. When the participants unfold the paper, it now contains 16 boxes in which the participants can perform their visioning activity.
3. Ask participants to number each square.
4. In the next step, participants will have a few moments of silent writing time to write brief vision statements in each of the 16 boxes. Each statement answers the question, "What/Where/How would I like to see myself doing at some point in the future?" These are intended to be personal statements. For example, participants might write, "Own a house," "Apply for scholarships," "Balance checkbook," or other similar statements. These will not be shared so participants can write whatever they wish.
5. After the participants have completed filling in their 16 boxes, ask them to go back and categorize their statements, as involving a) Health, b) Finances/Careers, or c) Personal Satisfaction.

6. After they have categorized their statements, ask them to go back and mark each statement as “short-term” or “long-term.”
7. Explain the benefits of performing this activity. First, it gives participants and chance to pause and reflect on what they would like to do and where they would like to go. Second, it creates an artifact from this moment in time, and what they do with it is up to them. In some cases, participants may set the sheet with their 16 squares aside and return to it a year from now if not later and see how much they’ve accomplished, how much progress they have made, or how much their goals have changed over the course of time. In other cases, participants might post their 16 squares on a refrigerator or bulletin board and refer to it on a daily basis. This is an activity where the more you put into it, the more you take away later.

Wrap Up:

Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” is an excellent example of vision. Handout 5 includes the text of the speech. If you can find a recording of the speech, you might wish to play it at the close of the session, to give participants inspirational final thoughts on the visioning concept.

Extensions: John Lennon’s song “Imagine” is an example of creative visioning for a better world. You may wish to take a few minutes to play a recording of the song to give participants a chance to reflect on visioning and possibility.

Visioning Handout 1: Vision as a Cornerstone of Leadership

There is a story about a priest, who was confronted by a soldier while he was walking down a road in pre-Revolutionary Russia. The soldier, aiming his rifle at the priest, commanded, “Who are you? Where are you going? Why are you going there?” Unfazed, the priest calmly replied, “How much do they pay you?” Somewhat surprised, the soldier responded, “Twenty-five kopecks a month.” The priest paused, and in a deeply thoughtful manner said, “I have a proposal for you. I’ll pay you fifty kopecks each month if you stop me here every day and challenge me to respond to those same three questions.”

-- *Leadership from The Inside Out*, Kevin Cashman

What is a vision?

Vision derives from a word literally meaning, “see.” What better word than vision to describe the capacity to be forward-looking and foresighted?

Vision suggests a future orientation.

A vision is an image, a picture of what could be. Visual metaphors are very common when we’re talking about the strategic intent of an organization.

Vision connotes a standard of excellence, an ideal. It implies a choice of values.

Vision also has the quality of uniqueness. It hints at what makes something special.

-- *The Leadership Challenge*, James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner

Visioning Handout 2: Creating a Vision

“Go far enough on the inner journey, go past ego toward true self – and you end up not lost in narcissism but returning to the world, bearing more gracefully the responsibilities that come with being human... Vision is rooted in a deep purpose that expresses your reason for existence, not simply an idea or statement; it’s a force in your heart. Your vision needs to be consistent with the values you live by day-to-day.”

– *Let Your Life Speak*, Parker Palmer

Questions to clarify values and vision:

How would I like to change the world for my team, my organization and myself?

If I could invent the future, what future would I invent for my team, my organization and myself?

What mission in life absolutely obsesses me?

What’s my dream about my work?

What’s the distinctive role or skill of my organization?

What’s my burning passion?

What work do I find absorbing, involving, and enthralling? What will happen in ten years if I remain absorbed, involved, and enthralled in that work?

What does my ideal look like?

What’s my personal agenda? What do I want to prove?

Adapted from *The Leadership Challenge*, James M Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner

Visioning Handout 3: Components of a Vision

VALUES – what do I/we care about?

VISION – what is possible?

Guiding questions to start creating a vision:

When I imagine having a phenomenal service year, what do I see? If we had a (healthy, safe, socially just, strong, caring, etc.) community, what would it look like?

MISSION – what is my/our purpose in working toward the vision?

Visioning Handout 4: A Shared Vision...

Is developed by people who implement and/or are impacted by the vision

Creates a picture of what is possible

Is based on shared, articulated values

Inspires collective action

Provides clarity for navigating conflicts

Is implemented/evaluated by all stakeholders, especially those most impacted.

Reflects the experiences, perspectives, assets and ideas of full community, rather than of a few

Answers the question: What kind of organization, community...world do we want to create?

Why create and utilize a shared vision?

"Creating a shared vision is an opportunity to establish clarity, unity, motivation and a shared understanding among stakeholders."

- Jill Conrad and Joseph Martinez

Creating a shared vision: one process

- Identify Stakeholders
- Eliminate Barriers to Stakeholder Participation
- Involve all Stakeholders Authentically
- Facilitate Group Agreement on the Values and Vision
- Build on-going support of the vision

Handout 5: Martin Luther King, Jr., “I Have a Dream”

“I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.”

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama, whose governor’s lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plains, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith with which I return to the South. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning, "My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring."

And if America is to be a great nation this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!

Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado!

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous peaks of California!

But not only that; let freedom ring from the Stone Mountain of Georgia!

Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of that old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!"