

SIGMA

Leadership Series



**Great Leaders
Have a Vision**



GREAT LEADERS HAVE A VISION

“ If you don't know where you are going,
how can you expect to get there?

— Basil S. Walsh

In the context of leadership, vision is the ability to see the "big picture" in an organization, industry, and economy. This includes having a clear sense of the organization's ideal future state and communicating this to others in a compelling way. Research has shown that leaders who take time to hone their visionary skills have a significant positive impact on organizational effectiveness.¹ Studies have also found that leaders with vision do a better job of fostering employee engagement and satisfaction.²

Vision isn't just important for senior leaders; it matters for middle and lower-level leaders as well. In fact, Google's data-driven Project Oxygen identified visionary leadership as one of the eight traits of stellar middle managers.³ Middle managers — and other leaders — benefit from having a vision because they are the ones who lead teams and align their direct reports with the organization's strategy overall.⁴ Studies have shown that visionary leaders foster a stronger shared understanding of strategy in their team, and organizations have a better commitment to execution as a result.⁵

In assessing your ability to set a vision, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I understand the mission and vision of our company?
- Do I have an idea of where I want to see my team in the next 5-10 years?
- Do I regularly communicate why we are doing what we are doing?
- Do I take time for strategic planning at the start — and throughout — each new project?
- Is my team aligned in its efforts to work together towards a common goal?

Improve Your Ability to Set a Vision

Check your alignment. While visionary leadership has been shown to benefit strategic implementation, studies have also shown that this only works when leaders are well-aligned with the organization's vision overall. Misaligned visionary managers, on the other hand, create confusion and uncertainty. Studies found that the more a misaligned manager displayed their visionary leadership, the less strategic alignment and commitment was observed among their team.⁶ To make sure your visionary leadership is effective, take time to review your organization's strategy and goals, and keep these in mind as you set your own.

Share your vision. In addition to keeping your vision well-aligned, make sure you communicate clearly with other leaders in your organization. Be transparent with your ideas and share your goals. This should be done with your direct reports as well as upper-level leaders. Sharing your vision with your superiors gives them the opportunity to make sure you're aligned, clarify any misunderstandings, and help you get back on track when you've drifted off course.

Engage your team. Vision isn't just set; it must also be carried forward. In the words of renowned American actor Will Rogers, "Even if you are on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there." In order to make sure your vision is carried forward, engage your team in the process of planning and execution. Studies have shown that feeling a sense of ownership over one's work is significantly correlated with increased engagement and organizational citizenship behaviors.⁷ To create this sense of ownership, engage your team in the visionary process and make sure they feel that they are carrying the team's vision, rather than your vision alone.

Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Become a Better Visionary Leader

- 1. Write it down:** Research has shown that people are 42% more likely to achieve their goals and dreams when they write them down on a regular basis.⁸ Before you begin a new project or task, take time to reflect on your vision and write it down. State your long-term goal, as well as the immediate tasks you need to accomplish along the way to stay aligned with that goal. Keep these outlines in a place where you will see them often and be reminded of your vision.
- 2. Take a step back:** Sometimes it's difficult to see the big picture when you get caught up in the whirlwind of day-to-day operations. Try taking a step back by setting aside a moment every day, 10 minutes every week, and half an hour every month simply to reflect. What went well? What didn't go well? Is the progress you're making still aligned with your vision? By dedicating time to regularly reflect on these questions, you can ensure your team stays on track.
- 3. Talk about it:** Visions need to be shared in order to be realized collectively. Set aside time at the beginning of each new project or quarter to share your vision. Make it engaging; use scenarios and storytelling to paint a picture of the progress you want to see. Beyond direct reports, share your vision with your co-workers and leaders. Studies show that people are more likely to achieve their goals if they've shared them with a superior, or someone whose opinion they value.⁹ Talk about your vision with your customers too. Research shows that 63% of customers prefer to buy products and services from companies that have a purpose or vision. Therefore, talking about your vision not only serves to motivate and engage your team, it can also help bring in business and engage your clientele.

Resources



[How Visionary Leaders Talk](#)



[Why Vision is the Most Important Thing for a Leader](#)



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¹ Taylor, Colette & Cornelius, Casey & Colvin, Kate. (2014). Visionary leadership and its relationship to organizational effectiveness. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*. 35. 566-583. 10.1108/LODJ-10-2012-0130.

² Cheema, S., Akram, A., Javed, F. (2015). Employee Engagement and Visionary Leadership: Impact on Customer and Employee Satisfaction. *Journal of Business Studies Quarterly*, 7 (2). ISSN 2152-1034.

³ Yasin Ates, N., Tarakci, M., P. Porck, J.P., van Knippenberg, D., & Groenen, P. (February 28, 2019). Why Visionary Leadership Fails. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2019/02/why-visionary-leadership-fails>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Wang, L., Law, K. S., Zhang, M. J., Li, Y. N., & Liang, Y. (2019). It's mine! Psychological ownership of one's job explains positive and negative workplace outcomes of job engagement. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 104(2), 229—246. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000337>.

⁸ Gardner, Sarah and Albee, Dave, "Study focuses on strategies for achieving goals, resolutions" (2015). Press Releases. 266.

⁹ Grabmeier, J. (September 3, 2019). Share your goals — but be careful whom you tell. *Ohio State News*. Retrieved from <https://news.osu.edu/share-your-goals--but-be-careful-whom-you-tell/>.

¹⁰ Accenture Strategy. (December 5, 2018). Majority of Consumers Buying from Companies That Take A Stand on Issues They Care About and Ditching Those That Don't, Accenture Study Finds. *Businesswire*. Retrieved from <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20181205005061/en/Majority-Consumers-Buying-Companies-Stand-Issues-Care>.