

MONDAY MANNA

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WANTED: ORGANISATIONAL VISION

By Stephen R. Graves

One of my favourite books in the Bible is the book of Proverbs, and one verse always stands out for me: *"Where there is no vision, the people perish"* (Proverbs 29:18). When Proverbs speaks of "vision," it means the kind of message a prophet brings. But I think this principle is not limited to Old Testament prophets. People, wherever they are, need a compelling vision to move past today's reality into tomorrow.

We need to imagine; to imagine what could be. Imagination can serve as the fertiliser of hope. Effective leaders need to create an organisational vision. People need to see a compelling picture of what they are working toward before they can do their best work. As businessman and writer Alvin Toffler said, "You've got to think about big things while you're doing small things so that all the small things go in the right direction." This is true for organisations of all types and sizes.

Who are we as an organisation? What are we about? What are we aiming to do? These are hard questions for leaders to answer, as feedback to a podcast on church small groups demonstrated. One writer commented, "Your small group is destined to die a slow, complacent, even cordial death without direction." The same can be true for any business or not-for-profit.

In one of his books, author Peter Block wrote, "One's vision is not a road map, but a compass." Perhaps I can help point you in the right direction for crafting an organisational vision for your people:

Ask the "What if" question. What is the impact you dream of having? Spend some time with your key people brainstorming an answer to this question. What would be the effect of realising your dreams and aspirations? "What if"?

What if you formulated a driving vision for passing on your business or organisation to the next generation? In times when many around us are struggling mightily, what if your company looked beyond pure profits? What if it became a voice for collaboration and reached out to three or four other entities in the community, even pooling resources for the greater good?

Create some tailwinds. I have written about the concept of "tailwinds" elsewhere, but basically it means you need some momentum working in your favour. Do you have signs of any tailwinds? Maybe a few key additions to your team? A new vision for the work – the mission – you want to pursue? How do you position yourself in front of those tailwinds? Are there other tailwinds, other forms of momentum, that you need to properly answer your "what if" question? How do you chase those down?

Make the vision clear. One of the Old Testament prophets, a man named Habakkuk, received a vision from God and instructions on how to use it: *"Write down this vision; clearly inscribe it on tablets so one may easily read it"* (Habakkuk 2:2). Most of the time, your people must learn it to own it. So, communicate it regularly – and in clearly understood, memorable ways.

Leaders often are clear in their own minds about the vision, but for some reason fail to impart it to those around them. Get the vision clear in your head and then transfer it to others. That kind of inspirational transfer could very well create a groundswell, a growing movement around you. Jonathan Swift said, "Vision is the art of seeing what is invisible to others." As a leader, you must get the vision out of your head and into the hearts of your people.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

How would you define “vision”? What does having vision mean to you personally?

What does it mean to have an organisational vision? Does your company or organisation have a clear vision right now? Explain your answer.

Why do you think it is important not only for the leader to possess a clear sense of vision, but also to be able to effectively communicate it to others?

From your experience, when people are introduced to a new vision and then begin to accept and implement it, what happens? Is there a role for faith in the development and carrying out of organisational vision? Should God be permitted to participate? Why or why not?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Psalm 74:9

Proverbs 16:3,9, 19:21, 20:24; 29:19

Matthew 9:37-38

Luke 10:2

John 13:12-17