



Leadership: Visioning -- Dreaming A Desired Future

First, a short history lesson

The world's largest pirate fleet was once based on the east coast of North America. By 1604, a long-standing war between England and Spain had finally ended. The King of England, anxious to preserve his dwindling stocks of gold, abandoned a fleet of sailors and Navy officers in Canada's Newfoundland, leaving them with little money or food, and no means of support. Captain Peter Easton converted these unemployed sailors and ships into a committed and powerful team. Under his leadership, these pirates became so powerful that ships sailing in the English Channel on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean paid them protection money. A Royal Navy fleet dispatched to capture the pirate fleet chose to join the pirates instead. How did Captain Easton convert a rag-tag collection of unemployed sailors into a force that could thrive in sea-lanes patrolled by the world's mightiest navy? A detailed examination of the records revealed that the key was a visioning process developed by earlier pirate leaders and still valid today.

Now, all about "Visioning"

Visioning is a process that helps us make a desired future visible. Visioning, pirate style, consisted of getting buy-in on:

- A shared purpose (to steal and share treasures).
- Where to sail to find treasures.
- Rules of conduct for every crewmember for the duration of the voyage.
- The election of, and agreement to obey, a captain.

Why do Visioning?

If there is anything more powerful than a leader with a compelling vision, it has to be an organization focused on a compelling vision. Such visions can:

- Focus and energize an organization to fulfill an important purpose, perhaps one that benefits all of humankind.
- Create a North Star to guide decision makers at every level within the organization.
- Raise the sights of everyone in the organization.
- Help to displace complacency

How to do Shared Visioning

To develop a shared vision for your organization, proceed as follows:

- Gather together your organizational leaders including some of your youngest but most promising colleagues. (They have much more at stake in future-oriented discussions than your most senior leaders.)
- Bring in a facilitator to manage the process and help generate fresh perspectives.
- Make your organization a real person. Set an empty chair at the head of the table, with a prominent name card bearing your organization's name on it.
- Scan the horizon for emerging future issues that will have big impacts on the world in which you expect to operate.
- Be bold. Strive to go where no one has gone before.
- Identify your organization's greater and lesser strengths (both existing and to be acquired).
- Analyze your competitive position, as seen through the eyes of your targeted future customers to identify and build upon your leadership in the marketplace.
- Aim to be the best. Compare yourself to, and commit to move closer to being, the ideal.
- Synthesize your findings into a succinct, compelling vision.

Compelling Visions

Compelling visions can:

- Give a sense of purpose and focus to your entire organization. Raise expectations and performance to much higher levels. Seek to benefit all of mankind rather than just the shareholders of an organization.
- Provide a focus to your organization.

Planning, Implementing and Rewarding

With a clear vision established, the next steps are to:

- Set (annually) measurable goals to track your success in moving closer to your ideal vision.
- Develop plans (a forward-looking strategic plan and annual operating plans) to fulfill your vision.
- Assign objectives and measurable goals for each level and team within your organization, asking them to develop their own plans to achieve their goals in support of the overall organizational vision and plan.
- Commit your leaders to articulate the vision daily (and when necessary, defend it).
- Reinforce your vision with rewards and recognition based on contributions to fulfilling your vision.

This article was contributed to Tips4Biz by [Bob Garrow](#), a leadership and business consultant who works with leaders to generate organizational missions, objectives and strategies. He facilitates decision-making sessions at every level of the organization to develop sub-strategies and coaches on enhancing performance. He can be reached at info@pirateleadership.com.