Communicating Vision

By John C. Maxwell

Nothing motivates an organization like a clear and compelling vision. But it can be tricky to paint a picture of what's in your mind so that others can see exactly what you're seeing. As a leader, how do you enable others to glimpse your vision and how do you inspire them to adopt it?

1) Connect relationally

Leaders err when they believe the content of their vision will sweep others up by itself. Don't focus on the mechanics of your message to the point where you disregard connecting with your team. People buy into the leader before they buy into the leader's vision. Touch a person's heart before you appeal to their head and ask for a hand.

2) Simplify the message

Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address has a place among the great speeches of American history, yet it was barely three minutes in length. As leader, we can learn a lot from Lincoln. When communicating vision, what you say is important, but how you say it determines whether or not the message sticks. Slice and dice your vision until it can be shared in a single sentence. The more concise you make your vision, the more memorable it will be.

3) Embody the vision

People need to see a vision to connect with it, which is why the great communicators harness imagery to amplify the power of their message. Storytelling gets much more mileage than fact-spewing. However, the best representation of a vision occurs when a leader embodies it. People sooner follow what they see than what they hear. When a leader is ablaze with passion, people invariably are attracted to the flame.

4) Prioritize Influencers

Leaders treat everyone with respect, but they certainly shouldn't spend equal time casting vision to each person. To make sure your vision catches on in your organization, prioritize sharing it with key decision-makers. Set up one-on-one meetings. Field questions and respond to concerns. Don't rush this step. If you convince key personnel to buy-in to your vision, oftentimes they will sell it for you to the rest of the organization. On the contrary, if you cannot gain their support, implementing your vision will be an uphill struggle.

5) Honor the Process

Speechmaking has merit, but vision casting happens daily, not just on one occasion. It's a process rather than an event. To communicate vision effectively requires continual reminders to keep it in the forefront of people's minds.

Once the vision begins to take shape, every victory is an opportunity to celebrate and reinforce the vision. Also, each defeat must be evaluated and put into perspective lest the setback dishearten people. Unless a leader actively and continually champions a vision, with time it will evaporate.
6) Call to Action

Leaders don't impart vision to make people feel good, but rather to change something. Communicating vision should motivate people to take action by enlisting them in a focused strategy. The goal isn't simply to get people to agree with a vision, but also to take responsibility for translating it into reality.