

OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP

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Introduction

Aspiring leaders acknowledge that the achievement of others offers a key to unlocking their own excellence.

Once read about a freight train that traveled 70 miles through northwest Ohio at speeds close to 50 miles per hour *by itself!*

As the train was being assembled, the braking system failed, and it suddenly took off. Near Kenton, the train slowed to about 10 miles per hour. A railroad employee started running alongside the runaway train, grabbed a railing on the diesel, and jumped on board, finally bringing the 47-car train to a stop.¹

There are times when leadership is a lot like trying to stop a runaway train. An organization can move toward its perceived destination under its own power as its leader runs alongside, frustrated and out of breath. At other times, the organizational train never leaves the station. The machinery is in place and the route is mapped, but nothing is moving.

Leadership isn't about moving machinery; it's about

moving people in a preferred direction toward a destination born out of vision.

Becky Hammon is a product of leadership that moves people. She was named as the first full-time female assistant coach in the National Basketball Association.

A star basketball player at Colorado State, Becky was always on a fast track to all-American status. What motivated her to greatness? In part, it was the affirmation of one leader, an assistant coach on the Colorado team.

The coach kept telling her she would do great things. Hammon reflects, “When she started speaking all that, she started planting seeds. ‘Yeah, maybe. Maybe I could do that if I worked really hard.’ You have those people speaking really good things in your life and it grows and produces fruit later on.” The San Antonio Spurs assistant emphasized, “Somebody had to initially plant those good seeds.”²

Leadership isn't about moving machinery; it's about moving people in a preferred direction toward a destination born out of vision.

This is a book about planting seeds, about relating to people and motivating them to be all-stars in your organization.

Outstanding Leadership focuses on people, not just plans and programs. It is born out of my 40-plus years of experiences as an executive leader of a denomination, a pastor of churches that grew from small or midsize constituencies into large churches, and a teacher of seminars on personal and

organizational growth that have helped more than a million attendees sharpen and expand their leadership skills.

In a more important sense, it is a personal letter to you, right where you are or where you hope to be on your leadership journey. I will help you grow in ten leadership areas as you learn how to...

- define an organizational vision
- develop a vision plan
- cast an inspiring vision to your constituency
- test your organizational vision for quality
- identify and use your leadership and vision skills
- set coaching objectives
- overcome leadership challenges
- communicate effectively with your team
- build winning relationships
- develop transformational leadership

In addition, I've provided valuable sidebar information, including tips from leaders of major corporations and organizations. (URLs are in the endnotes—I think you will find them to be great resources for further study on relational and motivational leadership.)

You may have a brilliant idea or product, a well-crafted vision plan to capture its uniqueness, and a highly organized vision-casting team to communicate it, but if you don't have

constituent or customer buy-in, your idea will probably gather dust on a shelf. I want to show you how to make it come alive, how to *sell* your vision plan through your team to your public, including your stakeholders.

Leadership never has an arrival date. It's a never-ending journey filled with the joy of developing people, casting visions, and launching projects that will add value to the lives of others.

Mine has been a journey of faith. My personal relationship with God has given me the opportunity to serve him in more than 90 countries of the world with some of his top-level team members.

Mine has been a journey of relationships. Along the way, I have been inspired and challenged by the leadership of others. They served as my teachers and helped to shape my thoughts on working with people and building relationships. And of course, my family and friends have affirmed and encouraged me in an awesome and loving way.

Mine has been a journey of love. I love what I do! To think that a boy from the poorest town in America could have an international network that includes people from nearly all cultures and economic groups is humbling and beyond anything I could have dreamed.

I hope and pray that your own leadership will be enriched by *Outstanding Leadership* and that you will lead with a strong emphasis on mentoring next-generation leaders.

Part 1

Leadership That Motivates

Defining Your Vision

Leaders not only have an eye on the horizon, they can see just beyond it.

Several years ago, the host of an event where I was speaking sent word that he wouldn't be able to meet me at the airport. When I asked how to find the person who would be driving me to the event, the host replied, "Just look for someone who looks like they're looking for you." If you've spent much time in the baggage claim area of a major airport, you know that would include almost everybody.

After several anxious minutes—and much looking for someone who looked like they might be looking for me—I spotted a man holding up a cardboard sign that read, "Dr. Stand Taller." Relieved to have found my driver, I walked toward him and said, "I'm trying! Honest, I'm trying!"

People need leaders who have a vision that relates to them and motivates them to action. They are looking for you, looking for leaders who will "stand taller." They want leaders with tall dreams and ambitions for themselves and for the

organizations they lead. They want leaders with a vision that connects with people and draws them in.

Vision and People

An effective vision is people-driven. It is defined and distributed with *people* in mind—people who will have a part in the process. Allyson Willoughby, in a *Leadership Now* article on creating a workplace employees love, said, “It’s important that employees...feel part of the decision-making process...Having their voice heard during these discussions can go a long way when it comes to employee satisfaction.”¹

A 1972 advertisement for Greyhound Lines said, “When you deal in basic needs, you’re always needed.” More recently, Greyhound CEO Dave Leach said, “[We’re] changing from an operational-focus organization to a customer- and employee-focused organization.”²

Five Traits That Most “Employers of Choice” Have in Common

1. People matter.
2. Employees feel heard.
3. People are empowered to grow.
4. Leaders are strong.
5. Employees are appreciated.³

Author Dale Galloway defined vision as “the ability, or the God-given gift, to see those things that are not as becoming a reality.”⁴ Martin Luther King Jr. embodied this definition in his last speech, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop”—a prophetic look toward a better time and the Promised Land.

Vision is an organization’s perceived direction based on its ideas and ideals. Whether it is framed in an organization’s statement of vision or mission, it is a dream extended by the leaders that grasps the hearts and minds of core followers. Vision has a simple framework.

- It usually begins with a person or group’s perceived solution to a common problem or need.
- It takes shape based on perceived steps that will propel a solution.
- It resides in the parameters of opportunity, skills, time, finances, and staffing.
- It lives and grows with buy-in from people who are convinced that they (and others) will be affected in a positive and helpful way.

Kenneth Labich offered this reminder of the power of a clear vision:

Don’t underestimate the power of a vision. McDonald’s founder, Ray Kroc, pictured his empire long before it existed, and he saw how to get it there. He invented the company

motto—“Quality, service, cleanliness and value”—and kept repeating it to employees for the rest of his life.⁵

Vision and Direction

The classic story of the politician giving a rousing speech against the evils of society illustrates the importance of a relational vision. “I pledge to rid the world of ageism, sexism, despotism, racism, and nepotism!” he exclaimed.

The crowd was electrified, and soon the applause was deafening. But when it died down, an elderly gentleman shouted out, “Good luck, mister! I’ve been trying to get rid of *rheumatism* for the last ten years!”

A vision that doesn’t affect people where they live is a lot like a fake Christmas tree—it has the look and feel of the real thing, but it just doesn’t smell right. A vision that relates provides team members and constituents with a cause and an accompanying cure—based on a need-answering, concise direction and destination.

A people-driven vision must also include...

definite places,
definite times, and
tangible results.

Vision and Practice

In his book *Coach Wooden: The 7 Principles That Shaped His Life and Will Change Yours*, Pat Williams shares the story of the legendary John Wooden. He relates that Wooden's life and career were shaped by a piece of paper handed to him at his graduation by his beloved father. It had a poem on one side and "Seven Rules for Living" on the other. That paper, along with a two-dollar bill, was all Joshua Wooden could afford to give his son, but the principles on the reverse side shaped the life of the coach—and every player he taught during his stellar career.

Many of the athletes he coached—whose pictures hang in basketball's Hall of Fame or who have excelled in business, education, or leadership—carry a copy of those principles to this day, including Williams.

1. Be true to yourself.
2. Help others.
3. Make each day your masterpiece.
4. Drink deeply from good books, especially the Bible.
5. Make friendship a fine art.
6. Build a shelter against a rainy day by the life you live.
7. Pray for guidance and counsel, and give thanks for your blessings each day.⁶

Hardly the content of philosophy, business, or management textbooks in most colleges or universities today, those seven down-home sentences motivated Coach Wooden and his team members to create one of the winningest basketball organizations in history.

A vision that relates provides team members and constituents with a cause and an accompanying cure—based on a need-answering, concise direction and destination.

A prominent religious leader was asked how his bestselling pamphlet on discovering a personal faith should be shared with intellectuals. He answered, “Just read slower.” Practical always trumps theoretical.

A vision must be practical. It must result in reasonable, people-focused goals and objectives. If people can't relate to the vision, it is likely irrelevant. Conversely, if a vision is definitive and easy to relate to, it gains relevance and buy-in as it is developed and distributed. As someone once said, “Motivate people to buy into and live the wisdom.”

If you will have a vision that motivates and relates, you must...

- envision it
- think it through
- write it out in its simplest, yet most detailed form

- be able to explain its details in a simple way
- illustrate its beginning, middle, and ending

And then watch its tiny seed blossom in excellent team efforts, especially in those team members whose input will help to flesh it out and in the hearts of customers or constituents.

Vision and Motivation

A vision should be inspirational! Motivation is directly linked to personalization—it inspires people to act and respond. Carl Jung said, “Your vision will become clear only when you look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.” When a plan or program or product personally affects us, we have an immediate stake in it.

Leadership Is About Emotion

Great leaders...

- read people’s (often unstated, sometimes unconscious) needs and desires
- welcome new knowledge and fresh input (even if challenging)
- know that what worked in one situation may be useless in another
- know that talented people don’t need or want hovering managers

- have a reputation for honesty
- treat everyone with a basic level of respect
- communicate the organization's strategies, goals, and challenges
- find out what employees' career goals are and help them reach them⁷

A vision is birthed in the mind and heart. It is a dynamic, fire-breathing dream of something that has never been done or needs to be done to increase the quality of life. The visionary leader is struck with a solution that will make things better. In the short term, it is the tiger on the loose. It roams or sits where it pleases. In the long term, it is the tiger that has been housebroken. It is trained and on a leash.

The motivation matures. It is assigned a practical direction.

Those who surround it become acquainted with it and, we hope, identify with it. In fact, the vision is effective only as long as people identify with it. Leaders who motivate and relate hold the leash on the tiger. Where they lead the vision—and how people relate to it—will depend on how it is introduced.

Where there is no vision, the people perish.

PROVERBS 29:18

Vision and Values

Leaders hold the keys to the “values gate.” Like it or not, the ethical nature of an organization is under their watch. Former president George H.W. Bush gave some practical, value-laden advice to such leaders:

First, no matter how hard-fought the issue, never get personal...

Second, do your homework. You can't lead without knowing what you are talking about...

Third, the American legislative process is one of give and take. Use your power as a leader to persuade, not intimidate...

Fourth, be considerate of the needs of your colleagues, even if they're at the bottom of the totem pole.⁸

Leaders need all the advice they can get—and sometimes get more than they want! But as captain of the organizational vessel, you are responsible to...

- chart the course,
- recruit and motivate the crew,
- secure the cargo, and
- keep the vessel on course till it reaches the destination.

You are also responsible to keep it up to code, to make sure it passes moral inspection by its constituents. The values of your “vessel” are most often a reflection of your own personal values. So great caution should be taken to make sure your organization stands tall in its community. How?

1. *Stay on track.* More than likely you have taken time to construct a statement of purpose—documenting the “whats, whys, and wherefores” of your organization. Your next important task will be to keep your organization and its products or services on track.

2. *Don't advertise something you can't deliver.* The integrity of many organizations has been tarnished by \$100 ads for \$10 programs! If you can't deliver the best, biggest, or most spectacular output on the face of the earth, don't promise that you can.

3. *Treat staff with respect.* As someone once said, “You're known not only by the company you keep but also by how you keep your company.” Your encouragement, compassion, training, and support for your staff will soon be well known in your community. (They'll also hear about staff abuse in a hurry!)

4. *Be open about plans and programs.* Some leaders act as if they're conducting an undercover operation. A lack of publicity about organizational programs or plans is a surefire integrity killer.

A friend of mine was once invited to be a staff member of a religious organization. When he arrived to begin his responsibilities, he soon discovered that his superior had neglected to tell anyone in the organization about the hire—including the governing board. A tsunami of embarrassment soon covered

all hopes of my friend's staff position. And the leader in charge of the covert operation lost his parking space.

5. *Keep the financial books open.* Stakeholders want to be informed when the cash flows and when it ebbs. One of the most important documents that an organization can publish is its financial report. Workhorses are skittish.

6. *Protect the integrity of the workers.* When new hires walk in the door of your organization, you are responsible for more than their health benefits and payroll. You are responsible to provide a safe environment.

Safety awareness includes more than passing out hard hats. It also includes providing an environment where staff members know they won't suffer any kind of harassment, where they feel accepted and appreciated, and where they are free to contribute to the organization's mission with excellence.

7. *Focus on the main thing.* Your greatest challenge will probably be to keep the organizational oars in the water, paddling in the direction of its mission. Along the way, you'll be tempted to take side trips or look for shortcuts. Your institution's integrity will also be known by its focus. Can it avoid expensive or faddish mission add-ons? That's up to you. When all else fails, stay the course.

War hero and former president of the United States Dwight D. Eisenhower said, "If a man's associates find him guilty of phoniness, if they find that he lacks forthright integrity, he will fail. His teachings and actions must square with each other. The first great need, therefore, is integrity and high purpose."⁹

A police officer once backed his cruiser into the alley beside the bank in a small town. He needed one more ticket to impress the new police chief.

Suddenly he spotted one of the town's senior citizens exiting from the only restaurant in town, a Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise connected to a corner convenience store. Grandpa climbed into the borrowed car—his grandson's new Mustang. But he was so impressed with the car that he forgot the bucket of chicken he had set on the roof before he climbed in.

Grandpa drove down Main Street a bit too fast and right through the town's only stop sign.

"This is my chance," the rookie officer thought as he switched on the flashing lights and pulsing siren.

Grandpa slowly pulled over. The police officer briskly walked to the driver's side, took the bucket of chicken from the roof, and held it to the window for Grandpa to see.

Unfazed, Grandpa rolled down the window and said with a kindly smile, "No thanks, son. I bought a bucket for myself."

Both were doing their jobs—the officer was protecting the law, and the grandpa was protecting his reputation as a generous and upstanding citizen of the community.

Do your job to the best of your ability and foster the best in others. This may be your best chance to define a world-changing vision, one that will make the world better for grandpas, police officers, and everyone else in your community.

In the next chapter, we'll look at the process of manufacturing the vision.