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## VISION

### *Begin With the End in Mind*

There is nothing more powerful than an organization whose resources are laser-focused on a vision that every employee clearly understands—so much so that they wake up each morning knowing their role in making that vision a reality.

#### **A COMPELLING VIEW OF THE FUTURE**

*Chuck:* Pick up any annual report; find the chairman’s message to shareholders and read the vision statement—the description of what the company aspires to be, what they will achieve, and how they will accomplish this.

Now go to any employee in the company (maybe your company) and ask him or her to tell you the company’s vision. Compare that response to the annual report message. Now ask another employee and maybe even a couple more. How consistent are the replies? In much of our work, we find the responses to be surprisingly consistent. They sound something like this, “Our vision? Well, we make (fill in the blank with the product).” Then read the vision statement to these employees and ask them how it affects what they do every day; in other

words, how do they act differently knowing what the vision is? The difference between what we *make* and what we strive to *become* are worlds apart.

Is it the lack of a vision that is the issue? Not really. Most companies have a vision somewhere that they put together for an annual report, a shareholder meeting, or as the result of an offsite planning retreat.

But the mere existence of a vision statement is not the goal. There are more than enough visions out there, full of jargon and “corporate speak” that only those who created them could really begin to understand.

What we are talking about is something far beyond the obligatory sanitized versions of “vision statements” that appear in many annual reports or corporate brochures. Rather, we mean a view of the future so compelling that it causes employees to get up every morning aspiring to achieve it—not only because they believe in it, but because they *clearly understand* their personal roles in accomplishing it. Likewise, your vision can distinguish your value proposition in the eyes of your customers and enhance their desire to align with your company. A vision at this level becomes the cornerstone and the context that steers all organizational choices and actions. It answers the most important question your employees will ever ask you: “Why are we doing what we are doing?”

### WHAT’S THE DEAL?

*Joe:* I often like to surpass the specific concept of vision and instead ask more general questions of people in an organization. If I were to ask your employees, “What’s the deal with you guys? What are you all about? What’s the point of all this

that you're doing?" What would their answers be? Think about all of your employees—certainly not just management or the leadership team. How would the receptionist, somebody from the IT department, or one of the guys or gals in the warehouse answer the question, "What's the deal with you guys?"

Sadly, members of most organizations wouldn't quite understand the question. The response would most likely be some form of, "I don't get it. What do you mean 'what's the deal with us?'" As Chuck said, if they had any answer at all, they'd probably respond with "we make computers" or "we do industrial cleaning" or "we are accountants." All of these are fine things to make, do, and be; but it's not the point. And it's not smart business.

What answer do I frequently get from members of companies that have people and strategy aligned? What do employees in companies with intentional leadership that has embraced the responsibility of driving a clear vision throughout the organization say about purpose? If I ask, "What's the deal with you guys?" there will be no hesitation. They'll tell me exactly what the deal is with them; and they'll go on to articulate the firm's vision, not as a memorized slogan, but in their own words and with their own grasp of what they aspire to be, what they want to achieve, and exactly how they will accomplish it. And most important—they will tell you exactly what role they play in all of this.

### **ALIGNING EVERY RESOURCE**

*Chuck:* It would be easy to characterize this work simply as "just doing the right thing" and making certain people "feel good" about what they do (which, by the way, isn't a bad thing). But it goes well beyond that. Leaders of organizations want to create a compelling vision for one reason: to deliver

the greatest value for customers and, as a result, employees and shareholders. And our best opportunity to do that is by putting *every* resource we have toward that end. No wasted effort, no isolated projects that don't support the vision, no meaningless (and endless) meetings, and certainly no disengaged or apathetic employees uncertain of how what they do matters in the greater scheme of things.

An intentionally crafted vision will engage, enlighten, and give greater purpose to our employees' work, which is a noble outcome in and of itself. In the end, however, leaders are obligated to develop value on behalf of all of our stakeholders. By failing to leverage the power of a strong and purposeful vision, we never realize the return of one of our most powerful assets and we default on one of our key responsibilities as leaders. Strength and clarity of vision are the key catalysts of employee empowerment and engagement and the foundation for aligning an organization's strategy and resources.

### A LIFE LESSON IN THE VALUE OF VISION

*Chuck:* Prior to starting my business career, I worked in a private hospital on a Physical Rehabilitation team counseling patients who had suffered significant trauma and their families. I remember one patient in particular who taught me one of the most valuable lessons I have ever learned about the power of a compelling vision (sometimes we learn our best lessons outside of our business environments).

Janet was a young mother admitted to the hospital after a horrendous car accident that left her paralyzed from the mid-chest down. Her rehabilitation was going to be measured in years, not months; and her days were made up of three

excruciating therapy rituals where a good day meant walking down the parallel bars 10 feet unassisted. A bad day—and they were countless—would end in frustration, tears, and anger, only to get up the next day to do it all over again. On top of all this, Janet was facing a prognosis that would have depressed even the most optimistic of us. Yet we marveled at her tenacity and conviction in the face of this unthinkable tragedy.

Janet and I spoke often about her challenges and her preparation to go home. I still remember one of those conversations like it was yesterday. It had been a grueling morning for her that ended with her collapsing face down on the floor, bloodying her nose and spraining her arm. While we waited for her physician, we discussed her frustration with the temporary setback. I mentioned to her that she had become quite an inspiration to her rehab team because of the relentless dedication she showed in her therapy. I told her that we were in awe of her ability to maintain this level of incredible effort day in and day out.

With blood still running from her nose and holding her injured arm at her side, Janet quietly pulled a picture of her two daughters from the pocket of her hospital gown. “Before we had the girls, Steve (her husband) and I talked about the type of parents we envisioned ourselves to be. We promised one another we would be the best mother and father we could imagine and knew *exactly* what that meant to each of us. I have no intention of wavering on that; it is my personal vision. This is who I want to be. The only difference is that now I will be doing this from a wheelchair.”

Janet was able to cross one of the deepest chasms imaginable because of the power of the vision she had for herself. She refused to allow her accident to alter who she intended to be

and every resource she could muster was aligned to realize this. Something that would have made many of us completely redefine our lives and what we stood for was for her an interruption on the path toward a clear and focused outcome.

*Never underestimate the power of a clear and compelling vision, in life or in business.*

### VISION-DRIVEN BEHAVIOR

*Joe:* From the power to change a life right down to the power of deciding what you should do in the next hour, a clear, compelling vision can bring powerful intention and alignment. That's why a vision should never be anything less than a living, breathing guide to every decision that's made in an organization—no matter how small that decision may seem.

I was speaking to an audience of about 80 people in a downtown Toronto hotel ballroom during a leadership meeting for a financial services client. In the middle of my presentation, the service door behind me opened and in walked a hotel employee with a tray of full water pitchers. Without a word—or any acknowledgment that there were people in the room or a presentation taking place—he began to replace the empty water pitchers on the tables with full ones. He banged and clanged his way through the room, walking in front of people—including myself—as he purposefully carried out his task. He was focused and doing a good job of replacing empty water pitchers. Unfortunately, the job he was doing was in direct conflict with part of the hotel's stated vision: to create an environment conducive to productivity and effective meetings.

The waiter was so fixed on his task that he missed the overall point, which, of course, was for us to have a productive

meeting. Though his momentary task was to replace empty water pitchers with full ones, it was a shame that he didn't let the company vision drive his behavior. Disrupting the meeting and distracting everyone in the room created the exact opposite effect of what the hotel staff should consider most important.

Vision should drive everything. What is the desired overall outcome? How can I best serve my customer, coworker, vendor, or community in the interest of fulfilling it? Sometimes even with the best of intentions we sacrifice the big picture by having counterproductive tunnel vision. This hotel employee, for instance, would have served the group's interests much better by waiting until a scheduled break to replace the water pitchers.

A balance takes place here, where to be fully engaged means to be totally present and intentional about the task at hand—yet also understanding how to make the greatest contribution toward achieving the vision.

This is the stuff that cartoons and clichés are made of: the short-sighted company policy that handcuffs employees in the interest of maintaining control over expenses—at the very expense of customer satisfaction, which ultimately determines the organization's fate. Short-term concerns over not “giving away the store” become the very reason that the store goes out of business—the vision to build a business based on lasting relationships was either ignored or never understood in the first place.

### **CONNECTED TO REALITY**

It's truly amazing how often I see companies whose behavior does not connect in any way to the stated vision. I sometimes shop at a neighborhood grocery store that is part of a regional

chain. This store advertises that they have “good value—low prices—and great taste.” I can’t argue with the fact that they deliver pretty well on all three of those promises. But there’s a disconnect.

Standing in the checkout line one day, I noticed the company’s vision statement posted on a big sign on the store’s front wall. It said, in part, that their goal was “to be the very best, most progressive, and innovative neighborhood store in America.” Okay, well, let’s think for a minute. This grocery store is a couple of blocks from a Trader Joe’s grocery store and about three blocks from a Whole Foods grocery store, both of which are very progressive and innovative stores. It’s also right across the street from an Apple Store, which may well be *the single most* progressive and innovative store in America.

Now don’t get me wrong; I shop at this grocery store because I like it. They do a good job. But the thing that stands out about them especially is selection. They’ve got everything you could possibly want and carry every major brand that’s out there. *That’s* where they have an edge on the likes of Trader Joe’s and Whole Foods—not in innovation! You certainly don’t want to claim that you are attempting to be the most progressive and innovative store around when you’re right across the street from an Apple Store unless you are truly engaging in some knock-your-socks-off innovation.

I actually don’t see anything particularly progressive or innovative in this store at all. Why in the world would they have that as their vision—and then completely ignore it? Either they are doing the wrong things or they’ve got the wrong vision. Frankly, I think it’s the latter. They should retool their vision statement so to steer the behavior they want (and are already



quite good at); and *that* will enable them to differentiate, create value, and ultimately succeed.

An effective vision has to connect directly with the reality of the company's everyday events. Otherwise, it's not only pointless; it may in fact confuse everyone from employees to customers.

### MATTERING

*Chuck:* After years of leading organizations, I've noticed that most people very much want to be a part of something bigger than themselves—to know that what they do 40, 50, or 60 hours a week actually makes a difference.

I believe this holds true for even the most cynical among us. Rare is the person who, when asked, "What do you do for a living?" is comfortable responding, "Well, nothing really. I just go in every day and do what they tell me to do. No one really notices or cares and then I just go back and do it again the next day."

This is in no way meant to suggest that a person's self-worth and reason for existing should depend solely upon their work. However, it does mean that, since people spend up to one half of their waking hours doing a particular job, they want to know that its significance carries beyond the activity itself. Being able to "see yourself" in the bigger picture and knowing the purpose of what you do is one of the most important ways to engage employees. Creating a powerful and compelling vision that lets others see that what they do every hour of every day truly matters in the greater scheme of things is incredibly important. Why? Because it addresses one of our basic human needs: to know we have a purpose in something greater than ourselves.

Now, if that causes some of us to think, "Okay fine, *whatever*;" then it's the employees' responsibility to figure it out for

themselves,” then we need to pause for a moment and ask: “In the end, who has the ultimate responsibility to deliver greater value in the company by aligning existing resources in the most effective manner?”

A quick look in the mirror answers our question. As leaders, we’re *uniquely* positioned to align vision, strategy, and people. It is one of the highest return and lowest cost strategies we can deploy—and, one of the fundamental obligations of leadership. Left to chance it will not happen on its own. But an intentional, focused leader can cause this to happen in an organization and as a result, drive greater success for everyone.

### I GET IT . . . WHY DOESN’T EVERYONE ELSE?

*Joe:* It’s not enough that, as the leader of an organization, you totally “get it” in terms of understanding the vision. Everyone else has to get it, too; your most fundamental job requirement is to make sure that happens. You can’t print the vision on a wallet card or put it in the power point presentation and think that, since all of your employees can read, they will embrace and live according to it. There’s a distinction between logically “understanding” the vision and emotionally “getting” it. If the members of your organization don’t comprehend the latter, you will find it extremely difficult to sustain success. If you’ve got a company full of people who have made *only* a logical, intellectual commitment, then you are at serious risk of failing. That might sound like a bold assertion, but it’s one that I completely stand by.

If, however, your employees are intellectually *and emotionally* committed, then you are in a much better position. You have to have both of these; and a vision that turns you on had better turn

your people on, too. A commitment to a job is pretty weak stuff to try and grow a business with. Commitment to “this is what I do with my life because it is truly important to me” is infinitely stronger.

### THE EMPLOYEE CHOICE

*Chuck:* When we ask an employee to “get on board” and fully connect with an organization, we sometimes forget that the employee requires a lot of information to consciously make this very important choice. Of course, many simply respond with the politically correct response and say they are “ready to go.” But I’m not talking about that type of buy in; I’m talking about a heart and mind commitment—the kind that reminds you *why* you are committed, *what* you are focused on, and that makes you feel as if you can’t get to work fast enough each day. That kind of commitment can only come from having the right knowledge and information. And that must come from one place—you as the leader.

To facilitate such a commitment, an organization’s leadership must first offer the right information to employees. This includes a vivid description on where the company is going, how they will get there, and why they will succeed. The most effective way to accomplish this is to so tightly align vision and strategy that every employee understands what the organization is doing, what success looks like, and their role in accomplishing it.

This level of information sharing is critical in order for the leaders to drive the inflection point I call the “Employee Choice”—the moment when they can say to their employee teams, “I have fulfilled my obligation to tell you where our

company is headed, how we will succeed, and the role we will ask you to play to help us get there. We can't get there without you. I now want you to use this information so that you can make the important choice to go with us."

Leaders who do this well achieve one of three possible (and intended) outcomes:

- First, their employees get it, see it, and are ready to go. Everything makes sense, and they willingly engage. If you have done your work well, a very large percentage of your employees will react in this way.
- Second, they want to go forward with you, but they have questions and need legitimate clarification on what you have told them to help them make this commitment. In these cases, we must commit ourselves to helping any team members work through this and to making certain that we have clearly communicated what they need in order for them to make this important decision. This will be the second-largest group of employees.
- Third, they find that (for whatever reason—perhaps a lack of confidence in the direction, strategy, or leadership) they do not want to "sign up." It is vitally important that company leaders recognize this choice as a legitimate one, to be honored accordingly. Well-informed employees who "self-select" out after having the best information on which to base their decisions have made a respectable choice; and their move to another area, division or company should be handled with the utmost respect and dignity. There is no vision or strategy 100 percent of people will agree with. While this third

faction will be the smallest group of employees, it is an important one because the organization will be watching to see how they are handled. Dignity and respect are the keywords here.

For the benefit of the organization, there is a fourth choice that must be avoided. It is when an employee who understands the company's direction and their role in it, chooses not to engage or leave. Instead, they simply stay, put their time in, keep their head down, and avoid responsibilities that other team members will have to bear. Today's companies are too lean and employee teams too interdependent to allow this. Not only is it unfair and disrespectful to those who made the choice to stay and fully engage, it compromises the value the company needs to deliver to customers and shareholders.

The only way to responsibly eliminate this undesirable fourth choice and push for this level of commitment is for leaders to empower their employees with clarity about the organization's course and resulting expectations. If this component is missing, the "employee choice" cannot be made in earnest. It is instead based on supposition and opinion rather than fact—neither of which creates a good outcome for such a critical choice.

The power of an intentionally developed and well-communicated vision that informs employees of a company's aspirations, intended accomplishments, and how they will achieve them is one of the most underutilized assets in business today. When done well, it is an engaging position that creates competitive distinction for a company and engages its employee teams by establishing a context for their action and behavior.

I've been asked whether this "choice" and "conversation" happens literally or figuratively. My answer is both, depending on the condition of the business and the urgency of the change needed. I've had these discussions with individuals and with teams of several thousand employees at one time; and I have been informed on more than one occasion that this could be risky. Perhaps, but not nearly as risky as leaving the opportunity to truly engage tens, hundreds, or thousands of employees to chance. That's a risk leaders simply cannot take.

### A GOOD JOB VERSUS THE RIGHT JOB

*Joe:* The old joke that says, "We don't know where we're going, but we're making good time" isn't very funny when it comes to your business. Too many leaders focus on "strategy execution" when instead what they need to do is step back and determine whether the strategy even makes sense in the first place. Your people may be doing a good job, but are they doing the *right* job? It's the old "efficiency versus effectiveness" question. So how do you know whether the appropriate tasks are getting accomplished? That's why you have a vision.

For example: If your goal is to be the lowest-cost airline and you're focusing on how to serve the best in-flight meals in the industry, then of course you're going to be out of whack. People in your company are working night and day to cut costs, while others are spending all their time trying to find the tastiest salad dressing. Your initial vision has pretty much already determined that you shouldn't serve in-flight meals at all. You're there to be the lowest-cost airline, not the best treat airline. Pick a lane and stay there. That's what your vision does for you.

## **MEASURING AND REWARDING THE WRONG THING**

Intentional leadership aligns people with strategy. Consider what you measure and reward, and whether or not your strategy achieves this end. Many companies measure and reward behavior on a daily basis that is absolutely counterproductive to the realization of the vision. Again, people are doing their tasks well, but they're completing the wrong tasks.

A client of mine did some remarkable work with a group of banks who joined together to study the challenge and opportunity of customer problem resolution. They focused on their call center operations, where most customers voice their complaints and problems. The bankers in the study said that they had expected their work to be about developing better scripts for the call center employees to use when resolving problems. What they ultimately discovered, however, was aligning people with strategy would create the most opportunity in this arena.

Surprisingly, most companies measure the length of the call in their call centers. They operate under the assumption that the faster you can turn the calls, the less time customers will have to wait, and the happier everyone will be. Efficiency will win the day. But when you look at a strategy of minimizing length of calls through the lens of the banks' vision statements, there is a serious disconnect.

Every one of the banks in the study said that creating high-quality relationships with customers was a priority. Some of them even had wording to that effect right in the vision statement. So think about it. Their stated priority is high-quality relationships; yet they measure and reward their employees based on getting those pesky customers off the phone as

quickly as possible. What? If the goal is to create significant connections with customers, then shouldn't they throw the scripts away and turn off all the clocks? Yes, they should. That's called alignment. You let your people be human beings with customers instead of script-readers. You take your time and ensure that the problems are resolved in a way that maximizes the customers' satisfaction and appreciation. You do what *you said you were going to do* in the vision. You make important through measurement and reward what you originally claimed was so vital in the vision.

### GET IN FRONT OF EVERYONE

*Chuck:* About a year ago, I was working with a financial services CEO and his four-person team. We met in an off-site location where we spent two full days together to review and create a new retail banking experience for them. As part of the session, we had asked the CEO to present an overview of their strategic plan to my partners, so that we could fully comprehend the vision and business strategy of the organization.

The CEO gave a 30-minute presentation to open our work together. He very appropriately started with the vision, which he used with Wall Street analysts. He then moved on to outline the business strategy and described how it would make the vision a reality on behalf of shareholders and employees. He was passionate, articulate and laid a strong foundation for our work together.

Later that evening, one of his team members came up to me after dinner and said she wanted to thank me for setting up this meeting. I told her we were pleased to do it and looked forward to a very productive couple of days together, given how well the



first one had gone. She agreed, and said, “Not only that, it was great to hear David (the CEO) talk about his vision. We never hear him talk about our future like that when we are back at the office; and we have been dying to know how he’s been thinking about our future. Now everything we are doing makes so much more sense—and it’s very exciting. I’m going to ask him if I can pass this on to my team when we get home.”

In retrospect, I hope the look on my face didn’t give away my thoughts; however, I’m fairly certain it did. We had just spent a 10-hour day with the top team at a leading financial institution, and one of the biggest perks for this EVP (the number 3 person) was that she got to hear the CEO talk about their vision and where the organization was heading. She even wanted to know if it *would be okay* to share it with her employees! I had to wonder how she, as a top officer of this company, would have ever learned about her own organization’s vision had we not initiated this session.

The key takeaway: A secret vision is a worthless vision. To assume that only the top team or person needs to get it is unacceptable—and tantamount to leaving one of the most powerful tools that a leader has on the table. If you have a strong and compelling vision you are proud to talk about, get in front of everyone with it. And if you don’t, then create one you do believe in.

### **GET ON BOARD WITH *WHAT*?**

*Joe:* Many years ago, I was participating in a planning session for a company’s annual employee meeting. The CEO had come in to give us his vision for the event. For 15 minutes, he told us that leadership had to get on board and get every employee on

board with them. He pointed out that they had good people and good products, but that they needed everyone to work together. By the end of his talk, everyone in the room was pretty clear that his goal for this upcoming meeting was to “get everyone on board.”

After the CEO left the room, we all just looked at each other. There was an uncomfortable silence—much like what you may have experienced when having dinner at your great aunt’s house and there is only the sound of rustling napkins because no one knows what to say. In this case, however, the discomfort was caused by the fact that everyone knew what to say; and finally, one brave soul did: “Get on board with *what?*”

This was a company that didn’t know who it was. If you had asked 50 of its employees what they were all about and what the point of it all was, you would have heard a variety of answers, the most common being, “I don’t have the first clue.” Anyone could tell you what they were selling; but no one could tell you where they were going. The CEO seemed to think that, if everyone just “got on board” with whatever was in front of them, everything would be fine. Performance would win out.

But excelling at tasks that have no point, no alignment with what everyone else is doing, and no emotional payoff for the employee is an exercise in setting speed records in a hamster’s wheel. There are countless companies that do a good job at things that don’t matter—neither to employees, nor to the marketplace. Ultimately, those companies go out of business.

### RELENTLESS TALK

*Chuck:* The notion of “getting in front of everyone” means exactly that. Companies who deliver added value through the leverage

of their vision relentlessly talk about it to their employees and—interestingly enough—to their shareholders, private investors, clients, suppliers, and anyone else who will listen. Why? Because they have intentionally designed their vision to be used in front of multiple audiences. This can be a tremendous source of pride and engagement for employee teams. Nothing instills more confidence in leadership than knowing that their leaders clearly “get it” and are willing to include them in “being in the know” with them. Additionally, it will give investors confidence that this company knows where it intends to go and will effectively align their resources in a manner that will create significant and measurable returns for them. And in front of a client or customer, this can be a powerful point of competitive distinction. We used to make certain ours was in front of our competition (not hard in a public company) because we wanted them to know exactly what they were up against; and *we* wanted to define the rules of the game, instead of leaving it up to them.

### THE LANGUAGE OF VISION

*Joe:* Many companies have vision statements written in flawless corporate-speak, often devoid of emotion, and therefore meaningless. It may be printed on pocket cards that every employee is required to carry or read aloud at the annual meeting. And few, if any, employees have any personal connection to it or feeling about it at all.

If your vision statement doesn't strike an emotional chord in employees, then what is its point? We're talking about a *vision*, not procedural guidelines. It should be something that any and every employee can verbalize succinctly and in their own words—not as some memorized slogan.

At a managers' meeting for a chain of emergency medical care clinics, I pressed one of the participants to tell me—in her own words—what the point of the company was. After a great deal of resistance (for fear of giving a “wrong” answer), she finally said, “Hey, we help people when they're hurt! Okay?”

Yes. Okay, indeed. I asked the group if any of them were particularly inspired by the company's vision statement. Not a single one said yes. I then asked if they were inspired by this woman's six-word vision statement: “We help people when they're hurt.” Every hand in the room was raised.

State your vision simply, powerfully, and with emotion. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. didn't inspire anyone by saying, “I have a strategic plan with the following bulleted points.” He said, “I have a dream.” Your mission should tap into employees' hearts and dreams. If it doesn't, then what's the point?

### EMPLOYEES OUT OF ALIGNMENT

*Chuck:* Communication of the vision throughout the organization should be one of the most significant and rewarding interaction opportunities we have with our employees. Yet companies too often fail to capitalize on this opportunity. Rather than a personal, engaging interaction, in far too many cases, it looks more like a talking head video that is given to department leaders, who then call their teams together and say, “Here is a video of Steve, our CEO, talking about our vision.”

Afterwards, the five-minute video is over and the manager asks, “Any questions?” Assuming there are any, rarely is the manager equipped to answer with any level of meaningful content or to engage in a strategic conversation to help the employees really internalize what they have heard. In one

client department meeting we attended, a line worker asked, “Can you tell us what he meant when he talked about how our strategy has changed?” To which the department manager said, “You just saw the video, so you know as much as I know,” and he then went on to cover the department’s other agenda topics.

His response wouldn’t have been described as the height of engagement or communication effectiveness; and you can bet it wasn’t what the CEO meant when he said, “Let’s get this message out.” It’s not at all hard to see why leaders get so frustrated when they think they have done the important work of passing down the knowledge to the entire organization—only to find that it’s barely made it out of their offices.

But who’s at fault here? The department manager who was told to show the talking head video? The employee who is trying to get it but can’t receive the answers she needs to understand it? Or the leadership who assumed that hundreds of hours of context development and incredibly important work could be delivered in a well-meaning but completely ineffective manner? This often used approach has the unintended consequence of actually diminishing the value of the time spent in crafting the strategy and vision in the first place.

To leave hundreds or thousands of employees out of alignment compromises the value we are tasked to create. Employees need to learn by asking, engaging, and internalizing in their own way. This doesn’t mean personal counseling sessions with every employee; it just means recognizing how your employees learn and structuring the communication of your strategy and vision accordingly. It means getting top leaders face to face with employees to communicate, explain and “honor the debate” as each employee seeks to understand in their own personal way.

Only then can you expect them to buy in on what you have spent hundreds of collective hours designing.

### I OWE HIM THAT

The ownership of the vision must come from the top before it can be shared across an organization. This is the principal role of leadership: defining where we will go, why, and how we will win. It cannot be discussed enough because it is the context for maintaining everything that comes after. Top leadership must be certain that every leader in the organization can articulate the vision in his or her authentic voice and be held accountable to do that. This is critical.

Is it hard work? Very. There will be times when you will be tired of hearing yourself talk, when you feel you simply can't talk about it anymore. In an interview with Lou Gehrig, one of the greatest baseball players of all time, a reporter asked, "Lou, after the thousands of games you have played, there must be days when you come to the park and just don't feel that you can give 100 percent, that you just go through the motions. It happens even to the best doesn't it?" To which Lou responded, "Actually, no it doesn't. When I come to the park and see that 10-year-old child watching me from the stands, I know this is likely the first time he has ever seen Lou Gehrig play; and I play for him like I played when it was my first time on the field. I owe him that." As leaders, we owe our teams the same level of passion and conviction in communicating the future success of our organizations.

### NOTHING LEFT TO CHANCE

*Chuck:* So ask yourself: If the leadership doesn't do this—then who does? Isn't that what we're obligated to do? Designing a

compelling view of the future is only as effective as the passionate and intentional way it is communicated to those whose lives it will affect. Deliver your message as if it is going to change the course of your organization forever—because it can. Don't simply throw something together to get it off of your to do list.

Companies that do communicate well-designed visions can have a great effect on redefining the purpose of certain functional areas. As an example: A company that realized that its new vision required an entirely new skill set in its customer-facing areas decided to retrain and repopulate all of their call centers. It became clear that the entire recruiting, assessment, and on-boarding process had to change.

As HR internalized the new plan, they appropriately asked the question, “Given this direction, how should we behave to ensure the success of our vision?” It quickly became clear that they found themselves in the role of a “talent agency” focused on aggressively *identifying and seeking* new talent—versus the old approach of screening talent that happened to come to them. Based on the profile of the skills needed, they now had to find new staff members through unconventional means—such as discovering people who might not even be in the market and convincing them to join the ranks of their company. And their biggest recruitment tool? The new vision.

When your company is propelled by a compelling vision of *what can be*—one in which all employees understand their role and how what they do matters—you will be assured that, as futurist John Schaar said, “The future is not some place we are going, but rather one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination.”

In that world, nothing should be left to chance.

**Five questions you should ask yourself about Vision:**

1. Can each of your employees describe the company vision? Do they know how their daily activities connect to its achievement (in other words, can they “see themselves” in it)?
2. Do you hold your leadership teams accountable for the regular communication of your vision to all employees?
3. Do your functional areas specifically build their strategies and organize to drive the achievement of the vision?
4. Do you share your vision with all stakeholders? Use it in client presentations or to recruit key employees? In the on-boarding process? In front of analysts or investors?
5. Have you intentionally designed your vision to be a competitive advantage in your market, actively sharing it with your customers and clients to distinguish your organization?