

Visionary Leadership

A leadership style to get your team aligned toward achieving your vision



THE ALTERNATIVE BOARD®

Visionary leaders forge new roads. They inspire greatness in those around them. They take chances, fail miserably and try, try again. Visionary leaders are people who have touched us in business, politics, technology, entertainment and fashion. In one-way or another, they touch us all.

No More “Business As Usual”

In order to thrive in this ever-changing economic climate and changing business market, we need to make some changes.

- We have to adapt to the current challenges we face daily, quarterly and annually.
- We need to adjust the way we lead our teams to enhance communication and productivity.
- We need to remember that change can be scary. For everyone.

If you adopt the attributes of visionary leadership covered here, you will help your team embrace change and your company will thrive with a real competitive advantage.

“If you can dream it, you can do it.” –Walt Disney

When you have visionary leadership, you see where you are going. You know what the ultimate goal is, and you don't get derailed simply because a wrench is thrown into your plans. You can be a visionary leader with steadfast direction, drive and dedication to leading your team to greatness.

What is a Visionary Leader?

A leader influences the direction and the behaviour of the team. This influence often comes from the fact that the person is charismatic, trustworthy, confident and skilled in the area in which they are involved. All of these traits are good, of course, but a visionary leader does so much more.

First, visionary leaders can see exactly where they want to go and are emotionally connected to where they want to be. Visionary leaders can help the people around them see with distinct clarity that same vision and evoke that same emotional connection to that vision. If you can do these things, you can become a visionary leader.

Visionary leaders have to communicate clearly and passionately. Evoking passion for something means that you can create an emotional connection with a purpose in others. When your team is emotionally tied to achieving something, success becomes a part of their pride and their individual passion for accomplishment.

Visionary Leaders Love New Ideas

Another important trait of visionary leadership is the ability, as well as the desire, to always be open to fresh, new ideas, no matter where those ideas may come from. We should all be open to learning every moment of every day.

- Allow your staff to show off their talents that may be above and beyond the actual requirements of their jobs.
- Encourage people to speak up and offer suggestions.
- Believe in the power of brainstorming.
- Never squelch an idea.
- Allow people to be creative and innovative.
- Always encourage creative thought from everyone on the team.

Remember... necessity breeds invention. You never know who is going to come up with the next great idea that will revolutionise what you are doing and how you are doing it.

Ask yourself:

- Are people in your organisation comfortable coming to you with new ideas?
- Do you inspire creative thinking?
- Is this the workplace culture you lead?

If yes, keep up the great work. If not, it's time to make some changes.

Visionary Leaders and Failure

A critical trait of visionary leadership is allowing people to make mistakes. This is essential if you want to support an atmosphere in which your team feels encouraged to think outside the box. If you are encouraging people to offer input, to be creative, and to have great ideas, you must be willing to see an idea fail. Use failure as a learning moment for the entire team without judgment or shame toward anyone.

With that, keep in mind, there is a difference between an acceptable failure and an unacceptable failure.

Acceptable failures happen when proper research is done early on, when everyone involved in the project understands the benefits and are diligently committed to its success.

Unacceptable failures are the opposite. These are failures that happen because the ideas were rushed; there was chaos in planning and carelessness in the execution. Unacceptable failures can also happen when you cave into the pressure of completing something quickly instead of doing it right.

The company's reaction to failure can be its doom or enliven future successful risk taking. If executives are accepting of failure – have failure parties, do post-mortem assessments, find ways to embrace mistakes and (tactfully) make light of them – then people will embrace risk. It's important to find opportunities for acceptable failure and lead your team to better solutions for greater success in the long term.

Visionary Leaders will look for the best thinking, not the safest. The most creative solutions, not the most cautious.

Visionary Leaders Give Credit Where Credit is Due

The final trait of a visionary leader is the ability to always give credit to others while deflecting it from one-self. This leadership trait is important to have because your employees and team members will truly admire you for it. Internally, people will know your contribution to the project. As the leader of the group, your recognition of the contributions of others is one of the largest parts of your leadership role.

When there is success, it is important for you to give credit to the team and to the individuals on the team. This practice evokes admiration, dedication and commitment from the people who work with you, and it will gain their trust and support, which is necessary to become a visionary leader.

These days, companies are doing more with less. People are working harder and longer and not getting paid any more than before. You must recognise the hard work of everyone on your team as often as possible. You cannot afford to go a long time without patting your team on the back for their dedication. Let them know you notice and appreciate the work they are doing as they are doing it. Start celebrating the small accomplishments, not just the major ones.

Along with the recognition they'll receive along the way, be sure you outline your team's incentives to succeed. Sometimes you will be able to reward staff with an increase in salaries or benefits. But maybe the rewards are not monetary. Consider that the reward might be job security, public recognition, a great sense of pride in accomplishment or an overall better lifestyle at the organisation. Whatever the reward is, make sure you communicate it clearly. Make sure your staff know not only what is at stake, but also what stands to be gained from their determination and dedication.

Visionary Leaders Empower Employees with Knowledge

Sometimes the vision is so large, and the end goal seems so far off that your team members may get side-tracked, discouraged and possibly lose motivation along the way. Visionary leaders keep everyone on track, focused and motivated by empowering employees with the knowledge of the steps they're taking while continually measuring progress and rewarding accomplishments.

To measure progress you need a clear plan for everyone to follow. If you know where you are going, you can measure how far you've come and where you still have to go. Then, take the opportunities you find along the way to remind them, as often as possible that the only way to get anywhere is to take one step at a time. Keep your team motivated, focused and always moving one more step forward.

How to Pass Your Vision to Your Team

In order to effectively communicate your vision and the passion you have for it, you'll need to decompose the goal down to micro-points so that everyone understands his or her specific role in your plan. How do they contribute? How do they make an impact? How will the vision benefit them?

Forget no one in the company as you convey what's "in it for them". Whether it's someone doing research, administrative duties, sales or presentation development, your job is to make sure each person on the team sees, understands, accepts, knows and embraces that what they do helps achieve the vision. Then, you need to make them feel good about it.

Own the vision and then help your team own the vision as well

Visionary Leaders Need the Right Team

It does not matter how focused you are on the vision or how much you can inspire your people. If you don't have the RIGHT team, it's not going to work.

You need to ask yourself, "Can my team reach the vision?" Because if they can't, you need to make some changes. At one point you may have HAD the right people on your team, but with the changes in your business and your competitive landscape, your strategy for reaching your vision may have changed. Therefore, if you haven't evaluated your team recently, you need to do so now more than ever.

As you begin this process, there are several questions you need to ask yourself about your team members:

- Can they see the vision?
- Are they aligned with the vision?
- Do they fear change or are they ready to take it on?
- Are they motivated to take action?
- What are their personal motivations and do they fit with your organisation's needs?
- Are their goals, both professional and personal, consistent with achieving your organisation's goals?

If your team is already with you and ready to go all the way, you've got something great. If not, then you may need to make some changes.

You need to know three important traits about all of your team members that will greatly improve your ability to lead them.

- What is their skill set? Do they have the skills to accomplish what you are asking of them?
- What are their strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats?
- What are their natural behaviours? For example: are they deal makers? Do they care about details? Do they thrive in a structured environment or is controlled chaos a better working atmosphere for them?

As you assess these factors, you need to make sure you have established the right environment for each person on the team to be successful.

You'll also need to understand what motivates your people to get up in the morning – what inspires them to want to do their best? With this knowledge, you'll be able to put them in a position that fulfills them and leads them to increase their productivity.

Good leaders, visionary leaders, consider and appreciate the behavioural styles and the natural motivations of people in addition to their skill assessments.

This team evaluation doesn't mean you have to go back and fire people. Perhaps you do. But maybe you just need to change their responsibilities so they can thrive and truly contribute to achieving the vision. You would be amazed at what progress can be made with realignment. Remember, think outside the box!

Become Part of the Visionary Leadership Club

Visionary leadership is not an exclusive club limited to the topmost member of the organisation. It takes place at all levels and can involve all people in an organisation.

In his book, *Jack: Straight from the Gut*, Jack Welch states that the important thing he urged every GE manager to remember was that "they are the CEO" as far as the people who worked directly for them are concerned.

At The Alternative Board, each department head is the CEO of their department. It is amazing what we can learn from this experience. Some people will rise to the occasion. Some will crumble under the pressure.

Visionary leadership should begin to infiltrate everyone in your company, in each department and on your team. No matter where someone falls on an organisational chart, he or she can be a visionary leader. And it's your job to get them there.

Cultivate True Visionary Leadership

Cultivating visionary leadership throughout a company helps maintain focus, increase productivity, promote a higher level of performance quality and increase profitability in all the work that is done. The best way to cultivate an atmosphere of visionary leadership is to get the decision-making power out of the C-suite and involve non-executives in decision making. When you do this, you'll let more people have a voice in the direction you are going. You will create a process to get buy-in from the entire organisation.

When your team members know they have a voice, it empowers them to feel the passion for achieving the goal—the vision. If you are truly open to learning from other people in your organisation, you need to create opportunities to hear them. If you have all the right people on your team, you will want to hear from them, and you will want to learn from them.

Strong communication with everyone means milestones are not missed and opportunities to recognise and inspire do not go overlooked.

The goal of all leaders is to be a productive and achieve organisational goals. As visionary leaders, we want to pull our team up to new heights—heights they want to reach no matter how hard the climb is—because they know what waits for them once they get there.

Is TAB for You?

The mission of The Alternative Board (TAB) is to provide small business owners with peer advice from fellow business owners and coaching from experienced business professionals. TAB helps forward-thinking business owners grow their businesses, increase profitability and improve their lives by leveraging local business advisory boards, private business coaching and proprietary strategic services.

Becoming a Member of The Alternative Board gives you access to resources and expert advice to help you develop a strategic plan so your business can thrive. [Find a TAB Board](#) near you and begin growing your business today.