

Have you ever wondered what is the common skill that is mastered by every successful leader? Leaders across all areas of life, whether you're a business leader, an academic leader, a leader in the church, or leader in your home – every successful leader has one skill in common. It's not personality, it's not charisma, it's not even strategy. Every great leader – loud or quiet, analytical or inspirational – they all have mastered one thing. And it's this: casting a vision.

Casting a vision – it's the single most foundational skill of every successful leader. And in order to cast a vision, well, first you have to create a vision. So, what is vision? A great vision – it starts with a dream. Dreaming is creating a future that doesn't exist. So, a vision is a picture of a preferred future. It's seeing what can be amidst what already is. It's seeing beyond what is and believing what can be. Because successful leaders, they don't settle for what is today. No, successful leaders, they dream of what can be tomorrow. And so, a vision is a single statement that captures the essence of that dream as it clearly states why that dream matters. And without vision, well, the dream will die. And although vision is so vital, it's so important, it won't create itself. It won't just mysteriously appear. You have to create it. And it takes time and intentional effort to create a great vision.

Now, once the vision is created, it then must be shaped. You see, an impactful vision, it should be broad and specific at the same time. It has to be broad. It has to be big enough that it gives room. Room for what? Room for ongoing growth and ongoing development and ongoing pursuit. But it has to be specific so that those who are carrying out the vision will know if they actually achieved it. And as the vision is shaped, it's really important to choose the right vocabulary words or source code because words, well, they're the source code of culture. And words can mean many different things to different people, so it's critical that those who are carrying the vision use the same words and have the same understanding of those words so the vision gets transferred with accuracy. Because when you have accuracy, then you can have unity and alignment.

Now, once you define and then you shape the vision, take a step back. Ask yourself a question. Do you believe in it? Not do you think it's a great idea or do you like the sound of it? No, do you believe in the vision that you've created? Because vision, it's not optional. Vision is not inspirational fluff. Vision is a requirement. Your vision – it is a must-be. If it's negotiable, it's not vision. It's a preference. The vision – it's what must be for the future you're creating to become a reality. I mean, think about it like this – Disneyland. Oh, Disneyland – it must be a magical place. A Tiffany's jewelry store – it must be breathtaking. The Ritz-Carlton – oh, it must be an unforgettable customer service experience. Your vision must be alive because without it, your dream will never come to life. Without it, the future you're trying to create, it won't be a dream come true. It'll simply be a good idea that never quite was. And if the vision doesn't capture your heart, there's no way it will capture the heart of those that you lead. And, therefore, it will not impact those that you actually hope it reaches. So, ask yourself this question: do I have a vision? A vision for my team? A vision for my business? A vision for my life? And if I do, is it just

a good idea or something that I hope happens? Or is it something that is an absolute must-be in your life?

Once the vision has settled in your heart and it is a non-negotiable must-be statement, then I encourage you to revisit it to make sure that it's ready to be clearly communicated. You see, a God-given vision, well, it has the power to move people from where they are to where they could be. But if you can't articulate it, you can't transfer it to other people. And if you can't clearly articulate where you're going, well, then people have no way of following you there. So, consider these four characteristics real quick of a vision that is well-defined.

Here's the first one – first thing – a vision must be clear. So, ask yourself, is my vision clear? It first has to be clear to you because if it's fuzzy to you, it's completely out of focus to those that are behind you. And clarity is kindness to the people that you're leading. And their ability to actually carry the vision, it is directly tied to your ability to clarify it. So, it's got to be clear.

Second – a great vision – it's concise. See, for the vision to be carried, it's got to be portable. So, avoid unnecessary words or phrases that can require explanation and just jumble things up. It helps if you can just stick with like short, simple statements. Here's a great one: Nike. You know what? Nike's official vision statement is this: it's "to inspire and to empower athletes everywhere." Now, that's awesome, but you know what? They have a public tagline that is commonly known as a support statement and I bet you know what it is – "Just do it." So, Nike, they have a five-word vision statement and then they have this three-word tagline. That is efficiency and excellence at its finest. Trust me, you don't want your vision to be like paragraphs in a framed art piece on the wall. You want your vision to be a concise statement with strong vocabulary that begs to be shared.

Next, a well-defined vision is consistent. It has to be consistent for it to stick. It has to be repeated. Use the same words – that source code – that wording over and over in lots of packages, lots of different scenarios, but you do it over and over so people can recognize it and remember it. Again, let's go back to that Nike example. Their three-word tagline, "Just do it," is everywhere. It's on posters. It's on commercials. It's on their products. They blast it on their social media. It's everywhere. Now, could you imagine Nike ever saying, "Hey guys, I think we've said, 'Just do it,' enough." They would never say that. Why? Because it's an anchor to the must-be vision of the organization. They will consistently, unapologetically throw that tag everywhere and you know what? That's why millions of people know that tag if they're asked. Millions of people that don't work for Nike and some of them, they don't even wear the brand. So, it's got to be consistent.

Once your vision is clear, it's concise, it's consistent, then it has to be compelling. I mean, vision is what motivates us in the good times and it's what actually fuels us when times get hard. So, you want your vision to be inspiring. You want to avoid like informational language and instead choose vocabulary that speaks to that value of the preferred future. Try to use words that would

like paint a picture – a picture that you can clearly see, but others cannot see it just yet. Home Depot. I think Home Depot does this really well. They say, "You can do it, we can help." Now listen, that inspires me. I'm somebody that can't even spell DIY, much less do a construction project, but you know what? That strong vocabulary – it sticks with me. And it would motivate me to begin something and it would give me comfort in knowing that there's somebody there to help me when the going gets hard. Successful leaders – they put in the hard work to create a vision.

Then the next step is mastering, mastering. How do you cast that vision? See, it doesn't matter if you created a vision or if it's a vision that came from your leadership team. Listen, it's yours. It's your vision. And if you want to cast it, you got to own it. First-class results do not come from second-hand vision. What do I mean by that? Well, second-hand vision, it's just that – it's second-hand. And it's used. Things that are second-hand, they're usually old and they're tired and the shine has come off of them. That cannot be true of how you cast your vision. It must be fresh. It must be vibrant. It must be something you believe in. Conveying that vision must be something you deeply desire. It must be something that you've adopted personally as a must-be in the area that you're leading. That's the only way that you're going to transfer first-hand ownership-level passion.

So, here's a question. If the vision that you're carrying was given to you by somebody else, and that somebody else quit carrying it, would you still carry it? And if you hesitate to answer that even, even a nanosecond pause of hesitation, then my friend, there's room for you to take greater ownership of the vision. Because ownership – that's a big word – because it suggests investment. And you know what? Before you make any large investment, don't you take time to prepare for it? Casting a vision is the same thing.

Casting a vision that you own – it requires significant preparation. I mean, your vision, it may be clear, and it may be concise, but you have to think about the audience that you're trying to communicate to. You have so much to consider. Like, what medium do you want to use to cast that vision? What stories or illustrations will help the follower adopt that vision? How will you go beyond just putting it in their head and actually depositing it in their heart? Because vision lives in the heart, and then it's executed through the hands. If the vision was not created by you, but it's being carried by you, you know what? It may take even more preparation. You can't simply rinse and repeat. You have to reinterpret and then redeliver because your audience is different. The people that you're leading – they are all different. So, you'll want to share with them based on their uniqueness, based on their unique listening style. What is their listening language? I mean, even Scripture says that we are to consider the words coming out of our mouth and only say what is beneficial. To me? No, what is beneficial to others.

So, question: how are you casting vision now? And can you specifically articulate how that vision is going to be a benefit to them? See, if your followers haven't adopted the vision, don't take it personal, but ask yourself if you've made it personal for them. It is, it is totally okay to

tailor your vision casting to your audience, but let me give you a caution. Transfer the heart and the passion of that vision uniquely, but don't compromise. Don't deviate from the vision itself in your cascading process. You might even need to break that vision down. It can be a simple stage steps so that those who are following you, they can catch the vision at first, and then you can give them more and more to keep that forward momentum. And you know what? If you're thinking, "Wow, that sounds like a lot of work." You know what? You're right. It is. It takes significant preparation, but you know what? It will yield significant progress.

It's worth the effort that you put into your vision. You know why? Because your vision is like a treasure. It deserves to be cherished and valued and to always be protected. Now, one of the ways that you can protect your vision is to constantly reinforce it. Great leaders know this. Great leaders know that vision leaks. So, it must constantly be reinforced. You can never assume your initial teach will be sufficient. And just because you eat and sleep and drink the vision, those that you're leading may not. In fact, they probably don't. So, you can't set it and forget it. And it doesn't matter how effective that first presentation, that first vision cast was. It doesn't matter how great it was because I promise you, it will leak. So, creativity's your friend. Find creative ways to explain the why. Find creative ways to tell them why that why vision matters – why we care, why vision aligns us. And most important, tell them why their part in carrying the vision is an essential must-be in your team, your organization, or your family.

Great leaders – they're opportunists. That means that they identify the opportune times to reinforce that vision. And one way that you can ensure this is done regularly, it's to take a look at the seasons – the seasons when casting the vision and resetting that culture would feel natural. Let me give you an example. For those that are leading in say an academic role, it would probably be at the beginning of the school year. Cast the vision, set the culture at the beginning of the school year. That's obvious, but you know when another opportune time is? After Labor Day, and after spring break, and when the semester changes, and the first day back after an unexpected snow week interruption. See, we all think of casting the vision at the beginning, but it's equally, if not more important, to recast that vision when any interruptions come along that could steal it. Any time – any time circumstances or interruptions – it's the perfect opportunity to remind them of that why. There are so many seasons to recast the vision. So, my encouragement to you is identify them and leverage them to keep your vision alive.

As long as that vision lives, it's important to keep it alive. You know how you do that? You have a process for quality control. You ask questions like this: Is it healthy? Is it thriving? Has somebody killed my vision and I didn't even know about it? I mean, you've worked so hard to cast the vision. You know what? It takes the same level of intensity and intentionality to keep it alive. It may take even more effort. And it's really important because a neglected vision – it can very easily lead to division. And that's the death roll of any organization or family. Division – it's die vision. That just means it's more than one vision. How do you know if this disease of division is within your organization? You go to the source. I mean, metrics and measurable

objectives, yes, those have their place. Yes, they're helpful, but vision flows like blood through a living being. So, how do you test blood flow? You take the pulse.

So, you go and talk to the people that you're leading. Ask them questions. Ask them, "What do you most enjoy about being on the team?" Ask them questions like, "Hey, what do you really think we're doing here? Why do you think we're doing it? And what role do you play in the bigger picture?" And then, listen. Oh, listen carefully to what they say, and then lean in and listen even closer to what they don't say. That, that is what will tell you if your vision is alive in their heart. Because vision drives culture, and culture sustains vision. So, you have to observe those that are carrying the vision. And think of it through this lens. Does their countenance and their action, does it support the vision? For example, if your success of your vision, if it depends on let's say details, then do you see your team visibly paying attention to details? If the success of your vision, if it depends on compassion and understanding, do you visibly see behavior of kindness being expressed? And sometimes, it can be this simple. It could be so simple as instilling like a single measurable act that will reinforce the vision. You know who does this? Chick-fil-A. You already know where I'm going with it. If you go to Chick-fil-A and you place an order for a chicken sandwich, and it gets delivered exactly as you ordered it, but the person at that register doesn't say, "My pleasure." I would submit to you the founder of Chick-fil-A would say, "Yeah, that one fell just short of fulfilling the vision."

When was the last time that you put intentional energy behind checking on the health of your vision? I mean, come on. You fought a good fight to find and to own and to cast that vision. Fight the good fight to protect it. Listen. Great leaders – they master the skill of vision casting. And you know what? The good news is, you are a leader with potential for greatness. And I hope that you will learn many skills. I hope that you will sharpen most of them, but I really, really hope you'll master the one that really counts. Ideas will inform. Goals will measure. But vision, that's what moves. So, come on. Dream with God. See the future. Create a vision. And then go and cast it.