



Clarity About Winning

1.) Quick Quote To Consider

"The great leaders of tomorrow will be the ones who understand how to get everyone to participate." Sara Little Turnbull

2.) Clarity About Winning

In Fast Company's March 2005 issue, there is an interview with Marcus Buckingham from The Gallup Organization on "The Clear Leader." Buckingham wrote one of my favorite management books: First, Break All the Rules. Here are his insights on being a successful leader.

Buckingham observed, "A leader's job is to rally people toward a better future... They succeed only when they find a way to make people excited by and confident in what comes next." Here's how that approach worked for one of my clients and his executive team when they were working on a strategic plan for the next 12 months. They had lots of ideas about new procedures and processes, and restructuring the organization. But as we talked, they realized that before they re-engineered the organization, they had to first define the direction they were going in.

Envisioning the Future

Once a direction was defined, the structure and processes for success would be clearer. But first, they had to identify what the future looked like for their organization. To aid them in visualizing that future, we completed the following exercise:

- From about 50 provocative photographs clipped from magazines and books, each person chose a photo that represented his or her personal image of the company. They then shared why they chose that image and what it represented to them about the company currently.
- For instance, one person chose an exploding volcano because it represented powerful energy and pressure building up. Although it was destructive, it was also the creation of something new.
- Each person then chose another photo of what they hoped the company would look like at the end of the next twelve months.
- One of the images was of a man relaxing in a chair with his legs folded and his head cradled back comfortably in his hands as 100 small TV screens with different images blinked at him from the wall. For this executive, it depicted control, information readily available, and visibility of all projects in a stress-free environment.
- Comparing the now and then images, we identified the themes represented by the photos. From this, a vision of the future emerged.

Sharing Your Vision

The next challenge is sharing this vision with the management team and staff to invite them to participate in its creation. Buckingham observes, "...in every society ever studied, people fear the future. The future is unstable, unknown, and therefore potentially dangerous."

As a leader, your role is to help people overcome their fear and join you in creating a shared future that offers opportunities for growth, excitement and success. To be able to do this, you need to be clear about what you hope to achieve. "...Your job is to make people more confident about the future you're dragging them into. To that end, you need to tell them why they're going to win... find the edge — one edge — and talk about it all the time. The more you talk about it, the more it becomes true," comments Buckingham.

Here are three approaches Buckingham has identified that are helpful in clarifying your vision of the future:

- Take a Time-Out
- You need time to think through your vision so that you can present a clear message and picture. This means "...distilling the world's complexity into a vivid path to the future."
- Practice Your Storytelling
- Find the words that will paint a vivid picture of the future you envision. Once you have created a compelling story, repeat it, repeat it, and repeat it. It should be a part of all your communication—e-mails, company meetings, speeches, etc.
- Show Us Your Hero
- Who is the person in your organization who represents this vision? What strengths does this person possess? What are her achievements? What makes him successful? "Praising that employee helps people see the future more clearly."

According to Buckingham, "If you do nothing else as a leader, be clear."

To read the article, visit www.fastcompany.com and click on magazine. If you want help in clarifying your vision and crafting your message, contact Karen Depew at 301.990.6331 or karen@northwoodconsulting.com.