

Organizational Vision

Vision or Mission?

We have a clear mission and vision statement. We frame it for everyone to have at their desks. When someone new joins us, he or she gets a framed mission and vision statement, too.

— Field Leader

Vision is often combined, and sometimes confused, with mission. The two are in fact distinct, but closely related, entities. Vision is a big-picture goal or target. It describes what the future looks like, for example, “\$20 million by 2012.” A vision builds agreement and commitment toward a shared future state. It keeps the team internally focused on individual, team and organizational goals and performance.

A mission, on the other hand, is more externally focused. It defines the reason your organization exists and describes the impact the team has on its clients and the community. For example, “To help people visualize and realize their potential.” A mission inspires by defining a purpose larger than the individual, team, agency or firm.

Vision and mission are both important to agency and firm success. They help teams answer, for themselves and their loved ones, the question, “Why do I devote so much of my life to this endeavor and to this particular firm?” Together, they create a shared aspiration that is at once both personally rewarding and larger than the self.

Then why the emphasis on vision in this study? Because the organizational vision is tuned to a specific target, and that keeps people focused on performance. It is also easier to create a direct line of sight from the organizational vision to team members’ personal visions. Team members can clearly see how the success of the agency or firm is linked to their own personal success.

Creating a Shared Organizational Vision

Successful leadership teams share a single vision for the organization. To truly function as a team, each member must consistently focus in the same direction. They must believe in and fully support the vision they share.

Belief in the vision comes about when leaders understand their own roles and the team’s role in achieving it. A clear understanding of roles and responsibilities helps them define how, as a team, they can achieve their vision.

To fully support the vision, leadership team members must also link their own personal visions to the organizational vision. This helps them identify why they personally want to achieve the vision.

Understanding where they are going (the organizational vision), how they will get there (roles and responsibilities) and why they want to succeed (personal visions) creates a strong, shared vision within the leadership team.

When the leadership team is passionate about pursuing the organizational vision, they demonstrate, with their words and actions, their commitment to achieving it. The leadership team extends the shared vision to the entire organization by keeping the essential message, “Where we are going,” clearly visible and by consistently communicating their belief in the organization’s ability to get there. Creating alignment and setting stretch goals (discussed in upcoming chapters) builds a high level of confidence that the leadership team supports the vision and that the vision can, indeed, be achieved.

At the end of every year, the leadership team comes together to outline issues for the next year. One thing we do is take inventory of the unique strengths each member brings to the team and talk about how he or she can use that talent to help achieve our vision. One member, for example is particularly good with technical issues. We’re planning to do some new things in marketing and recruiting, and he can lend his technical expertise to increase the efficiency of these systems.

— Field Leader

Creating a Dynamic Vision

An organizational vision is a living document. It's not meant to be filed away and forgotten. To drive performance, your vision must be integrated into your everyday business processes. It must also be dynamic enough to adapt to changes in your organization, market and other circumstances.

As shown in figure 1.2, our research revealed that high-performing agencies and firms review their visions at a significantly higher rate than their lower performing counterparts.

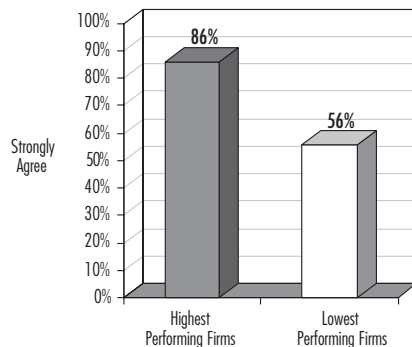


Figure 1.2. Leading Firms Are More Likely to Regularly Review Vision

The process of reviewing your vision serves not only as a reminder, but also as clarification and reinforcement that helps align and realign the organization — a dynamic that is central to the success of the highest performing agencies and firms.

There are three things high-performing leadership teams do to ensure their visions keep them pointed in the right direction:

- **Review vision statements at least once a year.** They recognize the need to periodically renew their commitment to the vision, and even adjust it to accommodate any changes in the organization or industry.
- **Do more than just re-read the vision.** High performers realize that a simple, quick read is a missed opportunity. They use the review to remind, reinforce and re-align. They are more likely to think carefully about a few key questions: “Does this vision statement still make good business sense?” “Is this who and what we really are?” “How might we strengthen the statement without compromising its most critical components?”

Four Attributes of Vision

- **Ideality.** The pursuit of excellence. A focus on possibilities and desired futures.
- **Uniqueness.** Pride in being different. What makes you singular and unequaled.
- **Future Orientation.** Looking forward. A long-term direction.
- **Imagery.** Pictures of the future. Visual references to the desired future.

J.M. Kouzes and B.Z. Posner. *The Leadership Challenge*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995.

For several years, our vision was, “the passionate pursuit of the performance platform.” However, we found it to be a little soft, and it could be interpreted in several ways. As much as we still like it, it’s just not precise enough. So in a recent planning session, we developed a new vision: “As a top 50 firm in the world, we will achieve top 10 status in our company by 2011.” It’s more specific, measurable and much clearer about what we’re building. And it’s much easier to create links to our own personal visions.

— Field Leader

- **Include as many people as possible in the reviews.** By including others, the organization is more likely to realize the full benefit of the review, and the vision will be accepted more rapidly and thoroughly throughout the organization.

A clearly communicated, shared organizational vision allows your leadership team to more fully and effectively leverage your firm’s limited and valuable resources. It provides direction to the entire organization and sets the target that drives performance.

▶▶▶ **Organizational Vision: What You Can Do**

- ▶ **Create a shared vision within the leadership team.** Craft an organizational vision that the leadership team is passionate about. Discuss as a group how each leader contributes to the vision. Use the vision to direct the actions of the leadership team.
- ▶ **Create a shared vision within the organization.** Communicate the vision everywhere and often through your words and actions. Include it in meetings and performance discussions. Identify opportunities for the leadership team to link specific activities and short-term goals to achieving the long-term vision. Use the vision to drive individual and team performance.
- ▶ **Review your vision regularly.** Within the leadership team, review the vision against changes in the industry or organization. Identify and make necessary adjustments. Within the organization, review the vision to reinforce, recommit and realign

Linking Personal Visions to the Organizational Vision

Every individual in your organization has a personal vision of his or her own. It may not be clear, but it’s there all the same: early retirement, the ability to entertain in style or the best education for their children. Successful leadership teams recognize this and carefully link the organizational vision to their associates’ personal visions.

That link cannot be made if leaders have no idea what associates want. Successful leadership teams get to know the aspirations and values of the people who work for them. And they help them to see how contributing to the organizational vision will help them to achieve their personal vision.

These individually tailored visions help pull advisers through tough times. This is especially critical for new advisers who face many obstacles early in their careers. Personal visions help them look beyond the immediate impediments and believe that with commitment and tenacity will come real and noteworthy success.

Reminding veteran advisers of their personal visions can help them get over a slump or motivate them to reach for the next level. High-performing leadership teams use personal visions purposefully to motivate individuals and drive performance.

I communicate to folks where we’re headed, why we are headed there and what that means for them.

— Field Leader

Personal Vision: One Leader's Story

Everyone's definition of success is different. But it comes down to hitting certain goals or objectives. There are three fundamental questions in accomplishing a goal:

- What is the goal?
- How am I going to get there?
- Why is this goal important?

If you have a big enough *why*, you can overcome any obstacles in the *how*. When defining success, many people don't go deep enough to determine why the goal is so important. For example, you might have a certain income level, say \$500,000, you want to achieve. But why? Is it so that you can donate \$100,000 to charities you're passionate about? There's your motivation, not the income itself.

In another example, someone choosing to run a marathon looks forward to crossing the finish line, but the real motivation is the sense of accomplishment, self-discipline and the feeling of doing something so few can do.

The *what* of a goal is meaningless without the *why*. So, don't focus on the *what*; focus on the *why*.

Personal visions are equally important for the leadership team. Leaders must believe that contributing to the firm's vision will help them achieve their own personal visions, and they must consistently demonstrate this through their actions and behaviors.

▶▶▶ Linking Personal Visions to the Organizational Vision: What You Can Do

- ▶ **Get to know your leaders' dreams and aspirations.** Take the time to meet with members of your leadership team individually to discuss their personal goals. Create a system to keep track of leaders' personal goals and identify opportunities to acknowledge milestones and link them to organizational success.
- ▶ **Share your own personal visions with the leadership team.** Show how they link to organizational goals and how you achieved or are achieving them by working toward the organizational goal.
- ▶ **Get to know your advisers' dreams and aspirations.** Develop processes for the leadership team to identify advisers' personal visions. Look for opportunities to connect their visions to the organizational vision. Link progress on organizational goals to progress on individual goals.
- ▶ **Share information within the leadership team.** When appropriate, share advisers' personal visions with the leadership team so each leader can reinforce the same message. Demonstrate that the team knows each associate and cares about him or her.
- ▶ **Celebrate success.** Acknowledge and celebrate advisers' accomplishments as they progress toward their personal goals.

We want to be the No. 1 firm, but I don't believe that, in and of itself, will inspire everyone. This is where an organization must connect its vision to how each individual benefits from it.

— Field Leader