

6 Ways to Responsibly Steward the Power of Vision

Recently a friend called looking for some advice. She and her husband were at a crossroads. A few years ago they had sold their home and most of their possessions, left family and long-time friends to take a job across the country. They knew it was risky adventure, but they were compelled by the vision of this organization. The organization had some audacious goals but not outside of the realm of possibility. They were excited about the possibilities. They asked lots of questions and took time to process with friends and mentors. They sought God for guidance and eventually made the leap.

Now they were struggling. They had made tremendous sacrifices only to discover that the organization really wasn't ready to pursue the vision they had cast. This family was in upheaval because a leader didn't fully understand the power of vision.

Sound crazy or extreme? Sadly, change the names and organizations and I hear a version of this story nearly every day.

Vision is essential for individuals, teams and organizations.

Proverbs reminds us "without vision people perish." Those of us who are visionary by nature use this scripture to help us find significance in the visionary gift that we have.

But visions are dangerously powerful and a leader who doesn't understand that power has the potential to cause irreparable damage to the people they lead.

One of my greatest concerns for leaders is that we don't fully grasp the weight of our influence on others. Influence by definition means, "the power to change or affect someone." Let this sink in... the POWER to change someone. Our position of influence gives us power that quite literally changes or at a minimum *affects* another person's life.

You understand this... Think about the influence your parents have on your life. Think about your first boss. Think about your soccer coach or piano teacher. Your life has been shaped by their influence, positively and negatively.

Visionary leaders create hope and possibility. They appeal to people's dreams and goals. They define a preferred future. The better a leader is at casting a compelling vision, the more influence they wield.

At their best, a visionary not only casts an inspiring vision, but they have the wherewithal to see that vision come to fruition. And while people may perish without a vision, we also know that "hope deferred makes the heart sick." When a leader does not have the ability to see a vision become a reality, they create pain and hopelessness for those they lead.

6 Steps for Responsibly Stewarding the Power of Vision:

1. **Refine your vision with the wisdom of others.** Visionary leaders nearly always underestimate what their ideas will entail. Because they are often removed from frontline activity, they have lost touch with what it takes to bring an idea to life. Don't cast your vision to the masses until you've worked it out with a team of people who can help you understand what it will really take. And by the way, make sure you really listen in this conversation. Your gregariousness and charm can woo others easily.
2. **Slow down and be cautious.** Once you've received critical feedback, count the cost for accomplishing this vision. What will it take? What will you risk? Who will take risks? What will it cost?
3. **Get in touch with reality.** As you've processed the impact and the cost, think through the critical points in this vision. What key conversations will you need to have? Who may try to derail it? How likely are they to succeed? What difficult decisions will you have to navigate in order to keep the vision on track? What happens and who is impacted if the vision isn't realized?
4. **Count the cost.** What will this require of you? Will it pull you from other priorities and if so, what is the potential impact? What will it take financially? Do you have the margin to pursue it? What will it require of your staff? What will they give up? If you're recruiting people based on the vision, what are they risking and if you were in their shoes would you take the risk?
5. **Proceed humbly.** If you have taken the time to process well and feel compelled to move forward with the vision, hold it humbly. Acknowledge what it is requiring of everyone, every step of the way.
6. **Evaluate your "why".** What motivates you to this vision? Is it a vision you would pursue even if it cost you everything?

Too often I see leaders cast a vision and pursue it without a full understanding of the cost and impact. We get starry-eyed with the thrill of accomplishing the goal, that we underestimate what it will cost, especially in human capital, to achieve it.

We've seen this play out with the business professional who scales the corporate ladder at the expense of his family. He cast a vision for why working hard would acquire their grand "American Dream" but they underestimated the sacrifice of their relationships.

We've witnessed the fast-growing church with their audacious growth goal that gets blindsided by a moral failure. They were racing so fast towards the vision that they blew past the warning signs.

We've read the stories of start-up companies that hire for rapid growth only to make drastic cuts when investment funds run out.

Visions have enormous power. And visions in the hands of strong leaders wield extraordinary power.

Power in and of itself is not bad, but power wielded carelessly leaves carnage.

Leaders, you have the sacred responsibility of stewardship. And two of the most precious things you'll steward are vision and people. They are inextricably linked – “without vision people perish” but without people, visions are just pipe dreams.

We need you to be visionaries. We need you to dream great, God-sized dreams. Please don't shrink away from that. However, we need you to equally recognize the power of those visions and if they are not birthed of God and nurtured with humility, you risk wielding your power dangerously.

Leadership is sacred work. Visionary leadership is powerful work. May you sacredly steward your power for the glory of God and the good of others.

[Read more from Jenni Catron here.](#)

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