

Communicate Your Vision: Use More Than Words

The right vision for the future of an organization moves people to action, and because of their action, the organization evolves and makes process. Like a bicycle, an organization must continually move forward, or fall over. The role of vision in driving the organization forward is indispensable.

The vision's power lies in its ability to grab the attention of those both inside and outside the organization and to focus that attention on a common dream – a sense of direction that both makes sense and provides direction.

To that end, your church's vision cannot exist merely as words on a page or website, or in an impressive visual display in your church foyer.

Articulating your vision through consistent and powerful ideas is one of the toughest tasks of leadership.

THE QUICK SUMMARY - [The Leader's Guide to Storytelling](#) by Stephen Denning

This revised and updated edition of the best-selling book *A Leader's Guide to Storytelling* shows how storytelling is one of the few ways to handle the most important and difficult challenges of leadership: sparking action, getting people to work together, and leading people into the future.

Using myriad illustrative examples and filled with how-to techniques, this hands-on guide clearly explains *how* you can learn to tell the right story at the right time.

A SIMPLE SOLUTION - Look forward by thinking backward

Whoever you are in the organization – leadership team, department director, or someone on the front lines – you can lead by using stories to effect change.

However, as leaders well know, most people do not like change. So any story involving an uncertain future that is different that the present faces a difficult road.

Humans naturally remain anchored to the past. We also have an aversion to loss – that is, we are typically more concerned about what we must give up rather than be excited about what we gain. We also have an ownership bias, meaning we want to hang on to what we have.

The truth is that people usually don't want to believe a future story that involves significant disruption. So what's a leader to do?

When we dream alone, it's just a dream. When we dream together, it's already the beginning of a new reality.

By definition, future stories aren't true stories. Since the future hasn't happened yet,

it's impossible to say anything totally reliable about it, particularly where human beings are involved. The first step in augmenting the credibility of a future story is to explore whether the length of the causal chain between the situation today and the imagined future can be reduced. The longer the chain of causation, the greater the chance that one or more of the links will break, as some unexpected development throws all predictions into chaos.

Since the plausibility of the story is related to the length of the causal chain, it's useful to take this thinking a step further. You can shorten the future causal chain to zero by using a springboard story.

A springboard story is a story about the past – something that has already happened. However, the springboard story elicits a future story in the minds of the listeners – the listeners start to imagine what the future could be like if they implemented the relevant change idea embedded in the story in their own contexts.

The springboard story itself doesn't need updating because it doesn't change: it's already happened. As a result, you avoid the yawning gap between the future as envisaged and the future as it unfolds.

Moreover, because the springboard story's listeners invent the future for themselves, they are much more likely to find that future alluring than if some stranger had dreamed it up for them.

Stephen Denning, [*The Leader's Guide to Storytelling*](#)

A NEXT STEP

Build a team vision exercise around the author's idea of the "springboard" story as described above.

Write down a sequence of activities describing your current vision that you would like to improve or update. Write down each activity on a sticky note.

Place the sticky notes in a row and start building new ideas for each sticky note. Ask: "If this hadn't happened, what would have instead?"

Every time you add a new idea, reflect on its impact on the rest of the sequence.

Continue with the rest of the sticky notes, adding as many new ideas to each activity as possible.

When you have finished, create a new story using the new ideas you have developed.

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*This is part of a weekly series posting excerpts from one of the most innovative content sources in the church world: **SUMS Remix** book excerpts for church leaders.*

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