

How (Not) to Inspire a Shared Vision

Like millions of other Americans, I tuned in to hear President Obama's second inaugural address. The President is rightly admired for his strong oratory skills and ability to use communication as an effective leadership skill. That's why I was so disappointed in the speech. While there were parts of the speech that resonated with me, overall I thought it landed flat. As I reflected on my disappointment, I realized that the President had not inspired a shared vision.

If you lead within a church, a ministry, a non-profit, a business or a community, **you must be able to communicate in order to lead**. As part of the communication responsibility, every leader must be able to inspire a shared vision. An inspired vision pulls people forward. It projects a clear image of a possible future and generates energy to strive toward the destination.

I think the President's address can help us better understand how to inspire a shared vision. Here are five components of an inspiring vision (adapted from Kouzes and Posner's The Leadership Challenge) along with my two cents on how the President performed on each:

1. An inspiring vision shares an **IDEAL**. An ideal is a high standard to aspire to, an ennobling purpose and greater good we are seeking. What followers need from our leaders is not a laundry list of ideals, but a single high standard to which we want to aspire.
2. An inspiring vision is **UNIQUE**, it creates healthy pride in being different by creating an identity that is extraordinary. An inspired vision helps followers know how we are collectively unique, singular, and unequaled.
3. An inspiring vision uses **IMAGE** to make concepts tangible through descriptive language. Word pictures, stories and symbols help make the vision more memorable and compelling. When a vision lacks true focus, the use of many images prevents the vision from being memorable.
4. An inspiring vision is **FUTURE-ORIENTED**, looking toward a destination. Visions describe an exciting possibility for the future and stretch our minds out into the future and asks us to dream.
5. An inspiring vision is built around a **COMMON GOOD**, a way people can come together. Visions are about developing a shared sense of destiny. Followers must be able to see themselves and their interests served in the vision; they must see how they are a part of the vision in order to enlist others in it.

So how well do you think the President inspired a shared vision? What worked and what missed the mark? And what are some examples of leaders who did a masterful job of inspiring a shared vision?

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