

# Paint a convincing picture to motivate

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A parent was sharing a future holiday destination, verbally painting the picture of the natural beauty and subsequent range of adventures it offered the family. This represented a future state, a dream that was part of an annual schedule – one that excited family members yet also one that required commitment from them. Funds need to be saved, destinations to be researched and other duties required to be completed before stepping onto the plane. Dedication to achieving the dream was high and support evident.

This is a great example of leadership – enabling others to come to a place that a leader can envision, and along the way influence others to act with conviction, never-ending enthusiasm and a “nothing can stop us” attitude.

So why does corporate leadership often achieve differing results? Resistance often replaces conviction, confusion replaces clarity and disconnection replaces engagement, for both the leader and the team. The answer is clear; this happens because a future state is neither clear nor shared as demonstrated above. This may happen because:

- **A leader cannot formulate a future state.**

Most leaders rise from the ranks of management. With that in mind, it is likely that previous success has focused on maintaining an operation and ensuring productivity flows. Transitioning to a leadership role, one that requires the ability to see a compelling future and one that touches on the purpose of the work, a manager must learn to master these essential leadership skills.

- **A leader cannot describe a future state.**

Once a future state is formulated, it needs to be shared consistently, regularly and clearly, in a manner that attracts interest. Some leaders simply cannot articulate well, some lack drive to do so and others may not have the credibility to own the message. After the message is shared the first time, the leader must be personifying this future state each day. Share it fully and freely, and ensure when it is shared there is lots of talk of “what’s in it for you”, with plenty of hope embedded in it. All descriptions should reinforce the reasons for the new future, the advantages it will bring and the risks it will fend off. By not describing, articulating and keeping it alive, a leader is simply accepting failure as the only option.

- **A leader may not believe in the future state.**

Some leaders inherit future visions and are charged with implementing change that will take the team towards that. When a dream is unrealistic, misaligned, seems intangible and unrealistic or simply does not feel right, no leader will personify it. True leaders do not live lies; when a compelling reason exists for a future state, they live and breathe it.

Consider this:

A centralised corporate decision has been made on a structure change, with the key executive now tasked with the implementation of this change

through regional outposts. The executive understands the what and why of the change and sends the news out to the regional leaders by email, who are subsequently shocked:

- The news bulletin is about a change for which no reasons have been given, which is bound to fuel fear and gossip.
- It refers to the how without connecting to the what.
- There is no clarity on what a future will look like.

A knee-jerk reaction has commenced, and at 5pm before the long weekend, the same email is forwarded by regional leaders with no warning to others. This change is derailed before it even starts.

As when starting a university degree, a student can keep their eye on the opportunities that will open when they graduate. Leaders of today must hone their skills to paint a picture of how life will be better, brighter and more efficient and effective through a defined future vision. Without this fundamental in place, countless opportunities exist for teams to sidestep the hard work associated with change and commitment to a new way of working. After all, we are only a leader if others think we are.

*Debbie Nicol, the managing director of Dubai-based business en motion, is a consultant on leadership and organisational development, strategic change and corporate culture.*

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