



## Facet: Vision

# Vision: a Dream or a Nightmare?

By [Andrew Atkins](#)

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**“A vision without a plan is nothing but a dream. A plan without a vision is a nightmare”**

Japanese Proverb

Next time you're at the office coffee pot, ask your fellow caffeine fanatics how they'd distinguish leaders from managers. Scratch below the surface of likely responses such as “leaders focus on doing the right things and managers focus on doing things right,” or “leaders show us what's possible,” and you'll find a common theme.

Leaders have to have Vision. We expect leaders to provide a sense of direction, and to do so in a way that engages and inspires us.

Communicating a sense of direction is part of the **leader's job description**. But, given the ceaseless onslaught of meetings, phone calls, presentations, and sundry other fires to fight, how are leaders to find the time and space for the quiet reflection needed to craft a compelling vision? This is an understandable concern if you are trying to form a grand view **of your group's future**. **The stakes are high for a leader who steps forward and tries to paint** an inspiring picture of the path forward. The vision needs to be based on a nuanced understanding of the strategic context. It needs to pass a sanity check from employees that it **represents a feasible application of the group's capabilities**. **The vision needs to speak to the** lofty hopes and aspirations of the group and rally people to invest discretionary effort to make the climb.

However, communicating these grand views in a formal setting is just a small portion of the vision work leaders need to do. Leaders also need to provide vision on a day-to-day basis.

In their classic *Harvard Business Review* article “A Survival Guide for Leaders,” Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky share the metaphor of “the balcony and the dance floor” to evoke the



fundamental leadership challenge of being in the midst of the action on the dance floor, while being able to get to the balcony, to pull back if only briefly, to gain perspective and see the larger patterns at play in the strategic context. Taking a moment to get perspective on the situation while remaining in the flow of the action, allows leaders to continually adapt to conditions. **When leaders communicate the insights and perspectives they've gained to their group, they are able to dynamically realign and reinforce a sense of direction.**

The Bates ExPI provides multi-rater feedback on two key facets of direction setting – Vision and Intentionality. Vision takes a broader view and calls on the leader both to paint a vivid **picture of the group's potential and to lay out a realistic, yet compelling, path to realizing that potential.** Intentionality is a no less critical facet focused on creating clarity of direction in the day-to-day and aligning action through engaging those you lead.

**We sometimes refer to Vision as “big V” and Intentionality as “little v” in recognition that both share a forward direction setting focus.** Both are necessary for effective alignment and execution. You might think of them as two sides of the same coin. Each without the other **can be either a dream or a nightmare, as the Japanese proverb made clear. What's neither a dream nor a nightmare is reality, and this is vital.** We must help those we lead to connect that larger picture to the day-to-day to connect the vision to the action. When we pair the facets of Vision and Intentionality in our work as leaders, we begin to make the possible real. We are able to see from the balcony while still staying active on the dance floor. **The two perspectives need to coexist. It's not a choice of Vision or Intentionality. It's the necessity of managing the tension inherent in pursuing Vision and Intentionality.** Communicating vision **on a large scale and in formal settings is inherent to the leader's role. Maintaining contact** with the broader perspective of Vision and continually communicating salient elements of that vision provides context for the day-to-day direction of Intentionality. As a leader, maintaining the connection between Vision and Intentionality and recognizing how they work together, rather than compete for your attention, allows you to maintain alignment of action for yourself and for your team.

How can you get started? Here are a few ideas:

- **When you're faced with a choice about the next action to take, pause for a moment and ask yourself “What else is going on that I haven't yet taken into account?”** This will prompt you to consider the larger context for individual actions.
- When you delegate work, spend at least as much time communicating the context and rationale for the work as you do in suggesting action steps. This will help the



person taking on the work to recognize whether the results achieved are appropriate, and to course-correct if they are not.

- In status or check-in meetings, regularly schedule an agenda item to revisit the context and goals of the work to help the team establish a line of sight between their work and the larger strategy

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