

EXECUTIVE

PROMOTING EXCELLENCE AND PROFESSIONALISM AMONG ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVES

FOCUS

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See It **Believe It** *Capture It*

3 Steps to Transform Your Leadership Vision into Reality

I'm walking through downtown Columbus, Ohio. It's early evening. The sun is low in the sky and casts a warm glow over the entire city. My eyesight becomes acute. I am looking. Searching. What am I looking for? Something unique. Bold. I happen upon a cement staircase. As I get closer, I notice the sun's radiance is lighting up the metal railing, throwing a deep, bold shadow up the staircase. The scene comes alive right before my eyes. This is it! I have found an exciting image in boring cement! I run down the stairs and – in my mind's eye – picture what this scene will look like once I turn it into a work of art. I am confident the photograph will look exactly like my mental picture. I raise my camera slowly and press the shutter release. Got it! That's the fine-art image I was looking for. I am a fine-art photographer, and this is how I capture my images. I see it. I believe it. I capture it. Leadership works the same way. You have to see a mental picture of where you are going. Your confidence will help empower your team to capture your image and bring it to life.



See It

Every leader must have a picture of a place to go – a destination to lead people. Without a picture or vision, you cannot lead. After all, leadership means taking people from one place to another. Therefore, picturing a destination is the foundation of all successful leadership. A leader without a vision is like a piano player without a piano or a kite without wind. Whether you have just become a leader or have been in leadership roles for decades, you should always keep before you a picture of your destination. Without a clear picture of our destination, we fall prey to doing business as usual. Routine, sameness, and status quo overcome

us. Leaders are – by definition – change makers. When you are called to lead, you are called to advance, move forward, and improve the situation. Therefore, the ability to create a picture of your destination distinguishes leaders. For example, a photographer can own million-dollar equipment, yet take ten-cent images. An artistic “eye” is what distinguishes photographers. Similarly, a fancy title, big office, or designer suit does not make you a leader. A leader's eye – your ability to picture your next move – is what makes you a true leader.

Here's a tip on setting your vision: Your customers and employees are a great place to start. Talk with them in person and ask them questions to help develop your vision.

- Where do you think the organization should go next?
- What do we need to accomplish?
- What should we improve?

When I was sent to a section of a government agency on special assignment to rebuild it, the section chief and I met in person with every employee. We asked similar questions and earnestly listened to their responses. Yes, this was time consuming, but it proved extremely valuable. After we completed this task, we had a clear picture of where we needed to go. Your organization may be too large to meet with every employee. But meet in person with as many of your customers and employees as you can. The more people you meet with, the sharper your vision. As a bonus, they will be honored that their thoughts and opinions helped shape the organization's vision. Finally, when looking for your vision, “see big.”

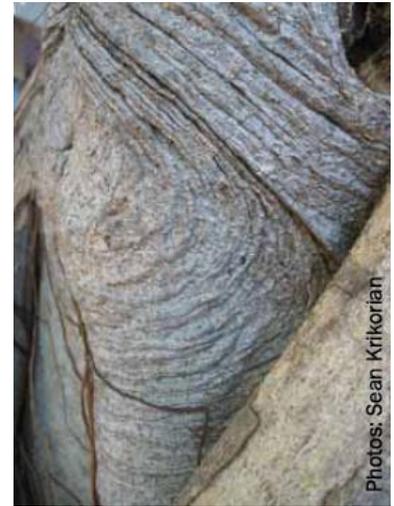
Don't set a tiny vision that's obviously achievable. If most people think you can capture the vision, it's too small! Great leaders see big pictures. This is one of the attributes that make them great.



Believe It

Once you set a pictured destination, you must believe in it. As a leader, you must be confident you and your team can bring this picture to life. If you – the leader – doesn't believe in the vision, who will? In fact, successful leaders are so confident, they start to act like they have achieved their clear-picture vision before they actually do so. These leaders have mastered something that few have learned: They "live in the picture." In the movie *Back to the Future II*, Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox's character) went forward in time and saw his future children, house and giant-screen TV. He was actually "living in the picture" of his future. Of course lots of mishap and adventure occurred in his future since this is a movie. Still this example can help us visualize what it means to "live in the picture". You believe in your imagined destination so much that you start acting like

you're already there. I was forced to learn how to live in the picture through an impoverished childhood. By the time I was 17 years old, my family and I had lived in two homeless shelters, a church, a small fourth-floor attic, a hotel, and roach infested public housing projects. In my teens, I worked any job I could find. I bought the nicest suit I could afford and a black briefcase. Why? I had created an image in my mind of achieving a successful career that involved going to work in a suit. And I was living in the picture. I believed in this vision so passionately that I wore the suit and carried the briefcase long before I had captured my picture. As a leader, I encourage you to learn how to live in your picture. Don't merely create a vision, but live it. Talk as if your clear-picture vision is already captured. Walk like you've already won! Don't wait for the future; claim your victory now. Live in the picture! Remember, your confidence is important for you, and it's important for your team. There's something about confidence that attracts people and makes them want to follow you. It also helps produce the "snowball effect." Imagine you're pushing a small ball of snow down a hill. As it rolls, it grows larger. Soon it gathers momentum and becomes self-propelled. As a leader, your confidence energizes the team until one person catches the vision. Another jumps on board and more follow. Soon, your team develops momentum and moves rapidly toward the pictured destination. They become highly motivated, energized, and focused on achieving the vision.



Photos: Sean Krikorian



Capture it

The best way to capture your vision is to work with others as a team to achieve it. Employ the perspective of others. I firmly believe that people are the most underutilized resource in organizations. In fact, I like to say that people are the only resource, because everything else pales in comparison to this rich resource of ingenuity and creativity. When I was getting ready for my first photography showcase, I rummaged through years of photos and selected what I thought were the best ones. My future wife happened upon one of the images in the "reject" pile and said, "I like this one." I didn't like it. And, while I cherish my wife's opinion, she wasn't privy to the photography classes I had taken or my years of photography

experience. Nevertheless, I threw caution to the wind and included the photograph in the showcase. It was the most popular image at the exhibit! Regardless of his or her background and training, everyone has a unique perspective that can benefit the organization. As a leader, do your best to capitalize on your team members' individual perspectives and the team's collective uniqueness. And I don't mean just the executives – I mean everyone! Find ways for everyone to take part in creating and capturing the pictured vision. Finally, in order to capture your vision, you must get started now and keep moving. Growing up, my family's life was difficult. We moved around so much that I became an expert at packing on a moment's notice. My little red bag was always ready to go, filled with my most treasured gadgets and toys. Although this situation was challenging as a child, it taught me a rich leadership lesson: Don't languish in the status quo; you must keep moving forward! As a leader, you must keep moving toward your pictured vision. In good times, keep moving. In bad times, keep moving. Occasional doubt and despondency is normal and typical among great leaders. What distinguishes great leaders from others is that great leaders keep moving even when they are despondent. After I captured the staircase image, I walked a little more briskly. I was confident in my ability to "see better." That evening, I captured one of the strongest sets of images since I dove into photography years ago. My leadership lesson – and one that you'll experience too – is that when you capture a vision, you are energized, and you gain the clarity, momentum, and "oomph" to reach your next pictured destination. So go for it! Don't hold back!

See it. Believe it. Capture it.