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## **The Plan**

Another common problem in many leadership situations is a lack of vision. In reality, a lack of vision is the genesis of having no plan or a poor plan. If leaders do not know where they are going, no road will get them there. The leader has to have a plan. The leader's rope includes the vision and the plan. It is very important to understand that a ***leader's vision without a plan is simply a hallucination.*** Many people have vision, but few of them have the plan to make the vision become a reality. For the purposes of this discussion, we will consider the vision and plan together as the focus of the leader's rope.

A new leader took over the job of plant manager in a Midwestern city and quickly discovered that things moved along with little focus or direction. Employees operated primarily by doing their isolated jobs. There was no sense of team, unity, focus, goal, or accountability in this plant. The employees had worked for four different plant managers in the last six years and they did not think the manager made any significant difference in the operation of the plant. The results of this leadership were unsuccessful, but moderately effective. The followers saw themselves as productive because no one had told them otherwise. There were no production goals, no collaboration and no motivation to change.

The new manager had a vision of what the plant could be and he had a plan to achieve the vision, but he had so far been unable to implement the plan because he had not communicated the plan to the employees. This is the critical vision leadership

point: If the manager owns the vision and plan, but is unable to share ownership with other employees, the rope will be dropped. The rope of leadership will not achieve success if it is only in the hands of the leader. The leader has to find ways to get the employees or followers to share the rope. These are the recommended steps to help the leader share the rope:

1. ***Find a way to share the vision/plan.*** A common practice is to meet with the followers and communicate the vision and plan. However, the key motivator in this kind of meeting is simple. The leader must sell the followers on how it will benefit them.
2. ***Get input from the followers.*** The new leader could survey the employees and ask them key questions to ascertain input. The leader should ask questions such as: What is the greatest strength of this plant? If you had the power, what would you do to improve this plant? What is in need of immediate improvement? What is the ideal production quantity for the plant? The leader can take information obtained from this kind of survey and incorporate it into the vision and plan. The leader could also organize small groups from the various areas of operations (production, shipping, public relations, union leaders, etc.) to make suggestions. Gathering input from the followers gives them a sense of ownership.
3. ***Set expectations, rules and guidelines*** and make

sure that all employees have the information.

4. ***Set short term performance goals*** while providing close supervision, support, solid communication and accountability.
5. ***Post all results*** for employees to see and study.
6. ***Create quality assurance teams*** for input into the production, supervision and evaluation of the product.
7. ***Create ways for followers to assume more leadership*** in the production, supervision and evaluation of the product.
8. ***Create quality review meetings*** to allow different employees to work with the leader in making the plan operations more productive.
9. ***Find ways to celebrate***, recognize and compensate employees who earn the awards.
10. ***Allow employees to evaluate*** the leader's effectiveness for the year with recommendations for improvements.

These steps will allow the leader to share the rope with employees and develop leaders among them. Now the employees have the short rope, but when these steps have been accomplished, the followers will be ready for the leader's longer rope. The followers will be ready to take ownership in the new vision because they own the current operation.

This plant manager will improve the productivity of the plant and the employee followers will have new attitudes

about their jobs and trust in the leadership. However, if the plant manager leaves before a critical number of followers have ownership in the rope and vision the new progress will be compromised because ownership takes time to build.

### **Vision and Environment**

As I am writing this chapter, I am flying from Phoenix, Arizona to Indianapolis, Indiana. From my window seat in the emergency row of a B-737 airplane, I am observing the landscape from state to state. From this distance things are not truly what they seem at first glance. Many things are lost in the coloration of the landscape. You have to look very hard to make out objects below when you are flying at 30,000 feet.

Leaders develop vision by looking, living and learning. You must be educated to recognize what you are seeing. If you don't know about it you will have a tough time seeing it. In order to develop a vision a leader has to acquire knowledge and understanding. Once having this understanding the leader can then develop plans to make that vision come to life.

If a passenger is flying over a city that is very familiar to her, she can look out the window from great heights and recognize the land, places and objects below. Knowledge of the environment increases the ability to really see what is happening there. The twists and turns of the highway; the bend or break of the river are common happenings when you are knowledgeable about the environment. Leaders must be knowledgeable about the environment in order to improve their vision.

These observations remind me of the topography of the leadership journey that leaders must take as they work with their followers and the rope these leaders use in their journey to reach a successful goal or vision. However, during the leadership journey, leaders do not have the luxury of flying above the landscape of their circumstances. They will have to make the journey up close and personal interacting with the landscape of the leadership environment. The leader's vision and plan has to be strong enough to carry followers over the rough roads and difficult times. One of the keys to leadership is to be able to recognize where one is and how to make the appropriate adjustments when necessary.

The leader's rope (vision/plan) must be strong enough to support the followers in all landscape situations and conditions. When followers stumble and fall, the leader must offer the rope to help them back on their feet. When the land is flat and easy to travel, the leader can enjoy an unchallenged period; however, this is the perfect time to prepare for the tough times. President John F. Kennedy once said, "Prepare for war in the time of peace." It is extremely difficult to prepare for war during the battle. The leader knows that war, conflicts, and disasters will come.

No matter how flat the landscape may be in Kansas or Indiana, it will change in Colorado and Utah. Leaders must prepare the followers for the valleys, hills and mountains. It is the leader's responsibility and duty to use the rope (vision/plan) to prepare the followers for the journey, the battle, or the project. The leader's rope is the basic connection with the followers.

Followers must believe in the rope of the leader and hold tightly to it in all situations. The landscape will change and with change will come conflict, anxiety, fear and doubt. Some followers will fear the heights of the landscape. Others will fear lakes or oceans. Still others will fear the forest or desert. However, if they believe in the rope of the leader and hold on to it, they will overcome the fears created by changes in the landscape of the journey. The rope will provide a place to steady the insecure followers. If there is no vision (rope), it is very easy for followers to get lost in the landscape. If there is no vision, there is nothing for the followers to hold onto for support and direction.

Our experience in the United States with wars has taught us that our citizens will support their President and troops in campaigns against enemies who clearly are a threat to our democratic way of life, but when the danger is not clearly defined and the actions are not closely related to our interests, support waivers and gradually diminishes. World War I and World War II are vivid examples of wars that created a strong rope of connection with the U.S. citizens. There had to be sacrifices made to support the wars and both wars were necessary to protect our way of life, to protect democracy and freedom. However, the Viet Nam War never made that connection. It was never really seen as a war against our freedoms and liberties. It was in a place of unknown origin to most in the U.S. Many followers questioned why we were involved in such a war. The cost of the war grew and the death totals went higher and higher and then the anti-war backlash started to change America's view about the war. In the landscape of this war campaign, the rope was