

Creating a Better Future



If I were to ask you to rate your ability to *inspire a shared vision* with your team, what would you say?

In their seminal book *The Leadership Challenge*,¹ James Kouzes and Barry Posner tell us that inspiring a shared vision is one of the 5 critical competencies for leaders. Their work is based on research involving thousands of people in all sectors, including health care. Yet when I ask nursing leaders and managers to rate their skills in this area, they invariably give themselves low scores. And in my coaching and consulting engagements, this same challenge presents itself again and again.

Readers of The Coaching Forum are asking about this, too, so let's tackle this. While specific challenges require individual attention that is beyond the reach of this column, some aspects of inspiring an engaging vision are universal. For example, there are ways to assess your group's *readiness* for an invigorated vision. Readiness is a key ingredient of success for any change initiative, and a revitalized vision may represent a significant change for your team. Addressing readiness increases your likelihood of eliciting a vision that is alive, fresh, and championed by others.

The following measures of readiness are culled from my practice and experience with many nurse leaders, as well as myriad other leadership and coaching experts. As you consider these questions, think about whether they apply to you. Please consider whether there are other indicators of readiness that are well suited for *your* group. If there are, I invite you to submit those to The Coaching Forum. I will be glad to share a sampling of your ideas in a future issue.

Team History

What significant organizational events have members of your group experienced recently? If there are newer members of the group, what have they heard about past events from the veterans? What are your team's beliefs about patient care and administration in your organization? How

do members of your team feel about the way nursing was managed in the past versus how it is being managed today? What stories and feelings do they have about you? Most important, how do these stories and beliefs affect your efforts to inspire a shared vision?

Team Performance

How is the team performing? Are there factors that are propelling or undermining the group's effectiveness? If so, what are they? How can you address these issues so the team is ready to create an engaging, achievable, and sustainable vision?

Team Values

What core values do individuals on your team hold? What values do they share? The good news is that passions and core commitments to clinical excellence are remarkably similar among many nurses. In theory, these mutual loyalties can lead to a deeply motivating shared vision. But in real life, *the words people use* to describe their values *and the ways in which they use their words* can completely mask their core beliefs. While many nurses are dedicated to excellence in patient care, for example, they can have vastly different ways of expressing that dedication. It can be difficult for leaders to recognize, let alone embrace, distinctly different versions of nursing values they hold dear. If this is true for you, are there ways to move beyond your communication biases? How can you listen more openly to others' ways of expressing values and emotion?

Fresh Perspective

If I am a stranger visiting your team, what would I notice about the group's interaction? In what ways is the team working optimally, and in what ways is it functioning less well? How would the members of your team answer these questions? What do your answers tell you about your quest to inspire a shared vision?

Hopes and Other Variables

Are there other factors that will promote or prevent the success of your initiative? Would you benefit from other assistance and support as you move ahead? When and how will you involve other organizational stakeholders in your efforts?

What professional dreams do your team members have? What motivates them? Can their hopes be included in your collective vision?

After you have considered these questions, it is time to act. Your specific steps will depend on your unique circumstances, so I invite you to add to, select from, or customize the following suggestions.

First, identify the areas of alignment and misalignment within your team. If there are multiple challenges, select the highest-priority issues to address. If you find it difficult to choose just a few, pick the problems that will yield the greatest leverage—the “biggest bang for the buck”—when they are solved.

Next, if there is disenchantment or resistance (or both) in your ranks, formulate your strategy for handling it. Although unpleasant, this emotional reality can literally poison your success. Its impact must be acknowledged and managed. Then build on your commonalities, address your concerns, and develop a concrete action plan. Communicate with other organizational colleagues and elicit their support.

Now, move ahead! With your team, dream your dreams and create your vision. Articulate your strategy, your goals, and your plans for implementing the vision so it is achievable and sustainable. Identify milestones and occasions when the team will review progress. Select times when the group will celebrate successes and evaluate and adjust strategy.

While obvious, this last point deserves emphasis. In my practice I continually encounter nurse leaders who are so pressed for time that they

sacrifice what’s important in the long run for what’s pressing in the short run. This is understandable! But this habit has seriously undesirable consequences over time. In this case, your team will miss fertile opportunities to review and adjust so the new vision can take hold.

Making time to learn, reflect, and celebrate is well worth the effort. The return on your investment is both quantitative and qualitative. Your measurable results will be better, and your team will also *feel* better about their efforts. Let’s make no mistake: feelings matter when it comes to creating a better future. Remember, the task is to *inspire* a shared vision! Your team will appreciate you and your recognition of their opinions, their time, their talent and their commitment to creating—and living—into a vision of which you are all proud.

Reference

1. Kouzes JM, Posner BZ. The leadership challenge. New York: Jossey-Bass; 2003.

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Talk to Us

Please submit your leadership idea, dilemma, or question to The Coaching Forum, c/o d.drennan@elsevier.com. Contributions will be addressed individually or collectively as themes emerge.