

Vision without action is a dream: 4 simple steps to achieve a paradigm shift in your work

By Lyndsay Swinton

"Vision without action is a dream". So said Joel Barker in the late 70's and 80's, when he introduced the corporate world to the "paradigm shift". A "paradigm shift" is a radical change, more metamorphosis than evolution, of thinking. This was an extension of Thomas Kuhn's "The Structure of Scientific Revolution", popularized in the 60's. The printing press or more recently the internet, are examples of paradigm shifts - radical, irreversible changes in the way things work on a mass scale.

To quote Joel Barker more fully...

"Vision without action is a dream. Action without vision is simply passing the time. Action with vision is making a positive difference".

Joel Barker encouraged business leaders to have vision, to claim the future for their own. And work hard to secure that future, and make it a reality

Here in 4 simple steps, you can affect your own paradigm shift at work.

- Step 1 – Have an idea
- Step 2 – Sell the vision
- Step 3 – Plan how to get there
- Step 4 – Work really hard.

Easy huh? No need to go on with the article then....

Okay, I'll expand a little.

Step 1 – You need a crystal clear idea of what you want to achieve.

Managers have fallen in love with "Visions" and "Mission Statements" as totems of success. You can't possibly succeed if you don't have a "vision"! Hang on, isn't it the tribal witch doctor and his suitcase of mind altering narcotics that historically had "visions". And you'd be one step closer to the funny farm if you shared your vision in any other context than the board-room.

So why is this “vision” so important? Let’s define “vision” in the business context – it’s an image of the future that the company are trying to create. For example, the vision “one laptop per child” needs no further explanation. This [organisation’s mission statement](#), is “to create educational opportunities for the world’s poorest children by providing each child with a rugged, low cost, low power, connected laptop with content and software designed for collaborative, joyful, self-empowered learning...” Again, clear and concise, and is the umbrella for a multitude of activities big and small working toward making that vision a reality.

Putting the management hype about visions and mission statements to one side, it’s fundamental that a good leader knows what exactly what they want to achieve. If they don’t know where they’re going, how can anyone else expect to tag along?

Step 2 – people will come along for the ride if the destination is appealing.

Making a strong case for people to join you requires many skills. Charismatic leaders, painting evocative pictures usually encourage enough people to join them on their journey.

But the wheels come off the bus if you don’t consider the practical and mundane.

Step 3 – Plan the route.

Do you see where I’m going here with the journey thing.... Is there petrol in the bus? Have you packed food or are you stopping on the way? Do you need a mini-bus or a double decker? There are one hundred and one mundane bits of detail that take a vision from words to reality. And that takes attention to detail, planning, resourcing, negotiating deals and so on. Never the most glamorous tasks, but it’s what gets you where you want to go.

Step 4 – Work really hard.

This is the action bit, taking you in teeny tiny steps towards achieving your vision. Whether you’re running a big project, managing a team or doing fundraising for the local kid’s charity, you need to do stuff to make stuff happen.

Or to quote my granny, “Don’t have a wishbone where your back bone should be.”

And how does following these steps affect a “paradigm shift”?

The biggest shift in how you, your team or your company operates is as simple as following the four steps. Glib I know, but honestly we do waste a lot of management time getting complicated about things. Once you accept that, you can’t go back. And that is your own personal paradigm shift....

If you're part of a "vision" group, be mindful of Joel Barker about vision without action – it's a hallucination.

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