

Creating New Leaders: Moving from Fire-Fighter to Strategic Visionary



“

To accomplish great things we must first dream,
then visualize, then plan... believe... act!

Alfred A. Montapert

The complexity of organizations today reflects the inter-connectedness of systems, processes and people. Absent a path that builds long-term organization stewardship skills, leaders burnout and the organization suffers. Are long hours a badge of honor or a hazard? Is moving, humming bird-like, from issue to issue a testament to flexibility or an inability to have meaningful impact?

Vision

In today's complex organizations, we need to develop leaders who embrace vision over motion, change management over meaningless action, and issue resolution over fire-fighting. Success is not tied to the latest technology or business model. It is the way our leaders see the organization's future, create a path to realize it, and resolve the issues that impede the way.

This places organizations in a very precarious position. If they cannot find or develop the talent they need to leverage new technological investments, growth will be impeded and financial returns will suffer.

It is easy to belittle something as seemingly vague as vision. That would be a mistake. Vision drives change and determines an organization's future. Without a clear, compelling vision, organizations are left to the shifting winds of market forces—essentially responding to the enacted vision of other enterprises! Yet most corporate vision statements possess the vigor of wet rag and are about as useful for galvanizing the organization.

Vision is specific, compelling, shared, and comprehensive enough to enable an organization to start with the end in sight. Every action is a step on the path to achieving the promise of the future. This future orientation is the hallmark of a leader over a manager.

As the Japanese proverb states, "vision without action is a daydream and action without vision is a nightmare." When vision fails, it is often an absence of specificity that is to blame. Beware of creating a leader who is only visionary. From vision flows decisions that determine what an organization will and will not do. If few options are eliminated, action is unfocused. "The Seer" creates an organization that is all potential. Unrealized potential.

Vision is malleable and scalable. For a manager on the path to becoming a leader, learning how to develop vision can start early. Ask managers to craft a vision for their team within the context of the organization's vision and strategy. Good leaders craft a vision that reflects the language of the group to describe a future that is specific, compelling, shared, and comprehensive enough to be meaningful to all.

Change

With vision articulated, the ability to manage change is the next range of skills for developing managers as leaders.

With clear vision anything is possible. Making it probable—that's the hard part. The critical ingredient for successful change is the human element. Nothing beats the power of people working in concert, their end goal shared and their objectives aligned. Good project managers can become good leaders. Leaders manage expectations, commitments and accountability and tie it all together with communication. But the leader's role is not to do but to enable. "The Chief Doer" cannot accomplish

Build Leadership Bench Strength in High-Potential Managers

- Ask managers to create a vision for their team
- Provide project management and problem-solving training and opportunities
- Build analytic decision-making capabilities
- Build awareness of attention/time spent on revision, change, and resolution as leadership responsibilities increase



Oh, the vision thing.

George H. W. Bush

what they must as a leader if they intend to deliver, or worse yet, micro-manage every activity that creates value. The leader uses vision to inform and influence successful implementation.

Resolution

All leaders end up where they began; endlessly faced with the daily challenges of organizational life. But the leaders we seek to create see these challenges within a strategic context and reach beyond the impulse to fix things.

Typically leaders are drawn from the best problem solvers in an organization. Their problem-solving skills have helped them rise within the organization. But past success is why too many leaders focus on operational rather than strategic issues. We love the heroic "Fire Fighter," but constant fire fighting by leadership has little long-term impact. The very fires that are being extinguished arose due to a lack of vision and planning. By focusing new leaders on the vision and its implementation, we can grow the best fire fighters into holistic visionaries.

“

People underestimate their capacity for change. There is never a right time to do a difficult thing. A leader's job is to help people have vision of their potential.

John Porter

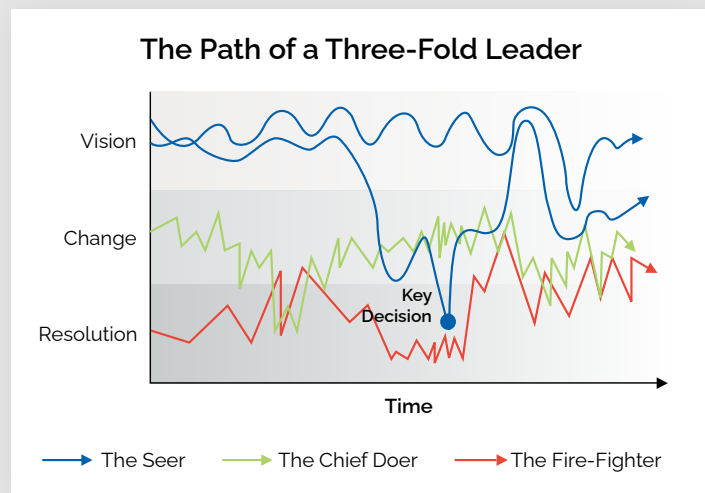
Vision, Change, Resolution: The Three-Fold Leader

Leaders know where to place their time. This is charted by balancing the time spent on vision and doing, and occasional resolution. Leaders will not delegate or neglect the creation of a compelling and engaging vision. They cannot remain fire fighters or get lost in the details of implementation. The decisions leaders make drive strategy implementation. The problems they solve are only the most intractable.

We need to develop high-potential managers into Three-fold Leaders who:

- Envision a better future
- Grow from successful individual contributors who got work done into mentors who get the best from everyone
- Resolve operational issues rarely, when they, and they alone, can resolve them

By developing people who can create a vision, manage change, and resolve issues as leaders, we can build the bench strength for tomorrow's success.





About Kepner-Tregoe

Kepner-Tregoe is the leader in problem-solving. For over six decades, Kepner-Tregoe has helped thousands of organizations worldwide solve millions of problems through more effective root cause analysis and decision-making skills. Kepner-Tregoe partners with organizations to significantly reduce cost and improve operational performance through problem-solving training, technology and consulting services.