CULTIVATING, CASTING AND CATCHING VISION

By Eric Swanson

In August 1964, under the backdrop of the Lincoln Memorial, Dr. Martin Luther King delivered the speech of his life and perhaps the speech of his generation, one that served as the seedbed of social change. "I Have a Dream" was a capsulated summary of the dream that a generation of African Americans felt in their hearts. Dr. King was a leader. "I Have a Dream" was his vision. What he foresaw was a better America of equality and brotherhood. His dream has fueled a thousand other dreams, many of which have become a reality. This is the power of vision. Every movement begins with a dream. The dream or vision is the force that invents and helps create the future.

What is vision?

Steven Covey has written, "All things are created twice." First, there is the mental creation, and then the physical creation. Vision pertains to this first creation. We have to see it before we can shape it into reality. From a Christian perspective, vision is the ability to clearly see and articulate where God wants us to go or what God wants us to do in any given situation. Vision is the bridge between present and future reality. As one man stated, “If you want to find a needle in a haystack it is almost impossible. Yet if you place a magnet on the edge of the haystack, the needles jump out.” Vision is that magnet that attracts followers and resources.

The importance of vision

The authors of *The Flight of the Buffalo* (Warner Books, 1993) write, “Vision is the beginning point for leading the journey. Vision focuses. Vision inspires...Vision is our alarm clock in the morning, our caffeine in the evening. Vision touches the heart. It becomes the criterion against which all behavior is measured. Vision becomes the glasses that tightly focus all of our sights and actions on that which we want to be tomorrow--not what we were yesterday or what we are today. The focus on vision disciplines us to think strategically. The vision is the framework for leading the journey.”

The story is told of three bricklayers working on the same job, each of whom was asked the question, "What are you doing?" The first responded, "I'm laying bricks." The second said, "I'm putting up a wall." The third responded, "I'm constructing a grand cathedral." All three were engaged in the same work, but only one had a vision for what he was really doing. To stay motivated, your staff must embrace a personal vision of what God wants *them* to do on campus. Most staff can't thrive on corporate vision alone--it may be too large for them. But they do need vision for their own ministries. Don't allow them to set foot on campus without vision. The strenuous work of campus ministry will soon drain them of life and energy if they are not empowered with vision. "*Without a vision, the people perish*" *(Proverbs 29:18).*

What a clear vision accomplishes

Haman Cross, pastor of Rosedale Baptist Church of Detroit, cites five things a well-articulated vision accomplishes.

1. Recruitment--vision beckons volunteers and resources. Movements with clear vision are much more likely to grow and attract visionary students than those that simply copy someone else's program. Like-minded people ask for the opportunity to be involved. Donors ask how they can help. A foundation recently gave Kansas University $15,000 to help them fulfill their vision for opening a campus ministry in Spain.
2. Retention--gets and keeps people on board.
3. Reminds us of the direction we’ve agreed to pursue.
4. Re-evaluates the ministry’s direction in light of the vision.
5. Relevance--forces us to be on the cutting edge to be effective.

Characteristics of vision

- Vision always refers to a future state or condition that does not presently exist. Vision shapes the future. You can determine what you will and will not do based on this vision. Vision gives you a sense of control and destiny.
- Vision refers to a change for the better. If we seek to maintain the status quo, we'll never see the need for vision.

- True vision is energizing. Fulfilling God's vision may require sacrificial work, but, when the work is a fulfillment of a vision, it's energizing. People don't want to be left out.
- True vision calls, summons and pulls us forward. It's "the magnet that attracts."

Cultivating and creating the vision

Much of the responsibility of developing the vision falls on the shoulders of the primary vision caster. John Kotter in *A Force for Change* (HBS Press, 1994) charges leaders with three responsibilities: 1) Establish clear direction, 2) Communicate vision and secure commitment to move ahead--alignment, and 3) Energize (motivate and inspire) people to overcome the obstacles that will surely arise. Teams are vital to the process of refining the vision, but you as the team leader must begin the process. So what do you do?

- Take time to think, read, study, listen, ask questions, pray and reflect. Vision is the product of learning from the past, correctly assessing the present, and seeing how the future could be different and better. Sometimes vision is the fruit of months of thinking and reflection. At other times, it's a flash of brilliance just right for your situation. Vision often arises from an unmet need or untapped opportunity. This is the case in Nehemiah 2. Ask God to give you his vision for your campus.
- Ask yourself, "What really dissatisfies me?" "What needs to be done that is not being done?" "What are we uniquely positioned and equipped to do?" "What untapped opportunities lie before us?" "What is God doing around us?" "What are my dissatisfactions, desires, hopes and dreams for the future?"
- What passages from the Scriptures reflect what God wants you to do? How can you personalize them?
- Study vision statements from churches, other Campus Crusade movements or businesses. Read or view "I Have a Dream." Which elements seem inspirational? Which parts tap into your dreams for the future?
- Make it worthwhile. Daniel Burnam, the chief architect who rebuilt Chicago after the fire is credited with saying, "Make no small plans for they have no ability to stir men's blood." Think of the scope of the vision that Jesus cast--"Preach the gospel to all the nations," and "Make disciples of all the nations." To ask for a God-sized vision fits well within the parameters of Ephesians 3:20--"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine...". If the vision for your ministry is not greater than the vision your students have for their own lives, it's doubtful they will exchange their life and time to be committed to what you're doing.
- Begin recording your vision in a three-ring binder with dividers, sectioned off by the specific elements of the vision you want to develop. This simple tool allows you to record and modify the vision. The primary vision-caster usually formulates the first draft. Make up a binder for all who will eventually help shape the vision. The notebook should include:
    - Purpose
    - Mission
    - Vision
    - Values and guiding principles
    - Position
    - Target audience
    - Strategic imperatives
    - Core competencies
    - Key objectives
- Formulating this vision is similar to decorating a room in a style so distinctly yours that, when you bring a piece of furniture or art into the room, it either fits or it doesn't. It either enhances the decor of the room or clashes with it.
- Challenge the vision. Step away from it and let it bake for a while. Is it clear, energizing, visual, future oriented, culturally relevant, realistic yet challenging, etc.?
- Revise and modify the vision with your team--those who are responsible for its' implementation. The process takes time and is messy and difficult, but it's as necessary as the product itself.

Vision summary

Your ability to consistently cast the vision often depends on your ability to concisely and clearly articulate the vision. Your vision statement or vision summary should be expressive and vivid--the high water mark of what God can do in your ministry. It consists of just a few words that enable people to see what you're about, where you're going and why it matters. A good vision statement will have the ring of authenticity and

carries with it a sense of “Wow!” To be effective it must be: 1) relevant, 2) motivating, and 3) memorable. Vision statements that fall short usually lack at least one of these elements. Consider President John F. Kennedy’s vision in April 1961 to “put a man on the moon by the end of the decade.” Although short, it was a clear and compelling image of what he expected.

The singularity of true vision

The strength of vision lies in its' singularity. To have dual or multiple visions of what you're about and where you're going is to invite misalignment. Another thing to avoid is false vision. False vision is someone else's vision that is imposed upon you but that you never really embrace. Although you may mouth the words, you're not really inspired by it, impassioned with it, nor committed to it. False vision is dangerous in that it serves as a substitute for what God may really want *you* to do.

What is not visionary?

- Stale programs and strategies.
- Numerically-driven objectives--“You cannot capture people’s souls for a number.”
- Statements that begin with, " Back when I was on campus..."
- Someone else's vision that you haven't embraced.
- Programs that just use people.
- Broad, generic statements of consensus.
- Slogans without implication.

What is visionary?

- Vision worth exchanging your time and life for.
- A picture of change that will genuinely benefit those involved.
- A simple vision that is genuinely embraced by you and your team. You own it.
- A vision specific enough to motivate action but broad enough to allow personal initiative.
- Ideas that develop and empower people.
- Statements or ideas that "feel right."
- Something exciting you look forward to recruiting others to join.
- Although spiritual in nature, it's firmly grounded and in touch with reality. It involves both the head and the heart.

Casting the vision to others

Creating vision is one thing...passing it on to others is quite another. Vision-casting involves a sender, a message and a receiver. Initially, the sender is you as the leader. Who you are as a leader and a person is of utmost importance. The credibility of the messenger greatly influences the message. Aligning with the vision is to align oneself with the vision-caster. The credibility of the vision- caster is based on the leader’s track record, his character, his personal commitment to the vision, and the credibility of the vision itself. Young Joshua and Caleb did a great job of casting the vision in Numbers 13 but lacked the credibility of experience to align the Israelites with the vision of entering the promised land. The vision was cast but not caught. Imparting the vision is too important to be left to chance. To effectively cast the vision you must:

- Be personally committed to fulfilling the vision. “You can’t light a fire with a wet match.”
- Know your audience. You must know how the fulfillment of the vision will benefit or affect your audience.
- Use example, metaphor and analogy. Use story telling more than statistics. Engage the hearts and minds of your audience. Speak positively.
- Use multiple forums (big meetings, small groups, formal and informal interaction) and repetition.
- Write it down, publish it, post it and frequently talk about it (Habakkuk 2:2).
- Meet with each ministry leader or leadership team, and walk them through the process. Help them to catch the vision and see their ministry in light of the vision. This is vital in recruiting others to embrace the vision. The primary tool you have in recruitment is the vision itself. It's “the magnet that attracts.” Begin with those who are most influential and will most likely be aligned with you and the vision. Don’t be surprised when people come on board at different rates. Some may never be aligned.
- Listen to and welcome feedback. Make revisions as you progress so that the vision has many fingerprints on it.

Catching a vision

Catching the vision is ultimately more important than casting the vision. To catch the vision is to be aligned with the vision. Without alignment to the

vision you will not be able to move in the same direction and have the synergy to overcome the obstacles. This act of alignment is the critical step between vision-casting and implementation. To bring about significant change requires a team to own the dream. To introduce a plan before aligning your team is to ensure a slow, frustrating death of the vision. People who disagree with the “ends” will argue about every “means.” In the process of aligning your team you're really building the foundations of team commitment, cooperation and community.

How do you know when people have caught the vision? The simplest test is this: those who catch the vision should be able to cast the vision. They have moved from customer to salesman of the vision. They're actively involved in recruiting others. Recall the freshly-recruited Andrew inviting his brother Peter to join with them.

The litmus test

Vision can be inspiring and energizing, but ultimately it must filter down to what people do differently because of the vision. Strategies, tactics and programming communicate the vision of a ministry stronger than the vision statement. What a ministry believes it is doing and what it is actually doing can be measured by its' programming