

Visionary Leadership: It takes courage

With the world in turmoil with the global financial crisis, climate change and environmental disasters, humans wreaking devastating harm on one another in various parts of the world, as a species we are facing some of the biggest challenges in history. Do you have the courage to lead confidently in these uncertain times?

If you can see these challenges as opportunity, you will be one of the survivors. As leaders, we must be pioneers in forging new relationships, new ways of doing business, new ways of being in the world. It requires comfort with ambiguity, confidence in uncertainty, and a willingness to celebrate diversity. It takes Visionary leadership.

Visionary leadership is an art. Unlike the managerial tools of policy, procedures, techniques and measures, it comes directly from knowing and understanding Self. A visionary leader is one who serves through being Trustworthy, Inspirational and Passionate. The emphasis on serving through being is the essence of our work with values and energy. There is no recipe; there are no seven steps or ten tips. It requires the courage to abandon what we “know to be so” and embrace the mystery and complexity of what it is to be human.

A visionary leader is clear about who he or she is, and exudes genuine SELF-confidence. Visionary Leaders have a confidence in who they are and what they stand for which is accompanied by trust that they can face whatever situations come their way.

A visionary leader knows and trusts in their ability to be infinitely creative, and also trusts that capacity in those he or she leads.

Why Visionary Leadership?

The prevailing model of the authoritarian leader is under-performing and failing, and in too many cases failing in spectacular yet sad circumstances. We only have to look at the Business section of daily press for numerous examples of this.

If I was to ask you “who is the source of your greatest frustration in your current business climate” and you find yourself pointing the accusatory finger of blame, then there are also the three fingers pointing back to YOU, giving you the answer to the question! Your profitability and success is a direct result of the quality of your leadership. No exceptions!

The good news is that you are also the solution.

The question is: Do you have the *courage* to liberate the visionary leader within?

What are the characteristics and skills of the visionary leader?

Authoritarian leaders focus on protecting what they’ve been in the past while Visionary leaders focus on what they are becoming in the present and future.

Key differences are illustrated in the table below:

Authoritarian	Visionary
Is very competitive.	Is very cooperative.
Is focused on the shareholder.	Is focused on the stakeholders.
Is risk averse.	Encourages innovation.
Is uncomfortable with uncertainty.	Revels in uncertainty.
Is a creator of teams that 'follow'.	Creates leaders at all levels.
Operates within a tangible framework.	Operates intuitively.
Seeks to control the enterprise.	Realises the enterprise is 'self-organising'.

Tells people what to do.	Listens by asking questions.
Talks of what the problem is.	Talks about possible solutions.
Is reactive	Is Creative
Is focused on “What’s in it for me?”	Is focused on “What will benefit US?”
Debates	Dialogues and values storytelling
Strong masculine energy	Strong feminine energy

How are these visionary behaviours developed?

It is important to note that these behaviours are not mutually exclusive. Today's leaders will benefit from being able to consciously operate along a continuum encompassing both styles as varying circumstances require.

The guidelines for learning the visionary behaviours above are rarely found in any current management texts, courses or training programs, let alone when you were at school.

Your choices to develop these behaviours are to:

- Engage a mentor or coach to assist you to unfold and develop these behaviours
- Read quality books and publications in this field
- Take regular time out for reflection – to listen to your inner voice and practice recognizing your intuition.
- Understand your values, and write your purpose, visions and strategies to reflect the most important priorities in your life.

The Language of Values

There is also a new language to be learnt, to understand the nature and role of values. **Values**, defined as our unconscious motivators, underpin every action we take. Everyone has values. Visionary leaders are people who have revisited and clarified their core values to consciously choose which values will be expressed in their lives. Visionary leaders pay attention to honouring and dissolving those values that are no longer useful to their future as a visionary leader and releasing the energy from values that keep them “stuck in the past” to values that energise them to create a compelling future.

Examples of this skill include:

- dissolving a lack of '*self worth**' and relocate the energy into '*being self**'
- dissolving the value of '*independence**' and relocating the energy into '*interdependence**'
- dissolving the need to be '*competitive**' and relocate the energy to being '*cooperative**'

** from an Australian model of 128 universally researched values (New Wisdom 11 by Colins and Chippendale)*

Now ask yourself, when did you last reflect on and review your:

- Personal work practices, e.g. reading, time management, paper management?
- Management skills, e.g. communications, project management, technical competencies?
- Leadership abilities, e.g. visioning, creating, listening, mentoring, thinking/concentrating?

May I suggest that the reality is that these skills and abilities continue to be essential and need to be under continuing formal review if you seek to be a leader of change and innovation?

The quantum leap forward for you as a Visionary leader, way beyond the above, is to become aware of your inner levels of consciousness, offering access to abilities that are infinite.

This inner level of consciousness within each of us is often experienced as a 'flash of insight', an instant solution to a complex situation, an entirely new idea, and in each instant you will express amazement and wonder 'how did I do that?' and 'where do they come from?'

The process of accessing the visionary leader within engages a wide range of innate abilities and will include:

- Being present with oneself.
- Being present with another
- Dissolving negative judgment of oneself and others
- Listening empathetically
- Detaching and transcending the senses
- Detaching and transcending the human constructs of time.
- Listening to your feelings
- Looking for patterns in the complexity of the issue at hand.

Now as you can see, to engage these deeper levels of consciousness calls for changes to your traditional work practices and the emphasis on rushing around getting things done to being at-one-within, thinking and concentrating.

Key questions for courageous leaders

1. Who is your mentor and your protégé?
2. What is your next formal learning project?
3. When will you formally refresh your purpose – for your Self, for your business and for the people you lead?
4. What must you, as a leader, be willing to give up or let go of in order for your business to be more flexible and responsive to change?
5. Reflect on three core principles which determine how your business currently operates. How are these helping or harming the business's ability to achieve its Vision?
6. What barriers will have to be removed in order for your business to be stronger, more profitable and exist 5 years from now?
7. What are your top 9 values that you orient your life around?

Our planet needs visionary leaders, your country, your organisations and communities need visionary leaders. Our children need new role models for leadership in the 21st century.

I urge you to rise to the challenges and be courageous enough to discover the visionary leader that resides within every one of you.

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