



Dear Friend,

## Just Give Me the Address...

Believe it or not, there actually were days before GPS devices. I know...it does seem as if we've been in the high-tech world forever!

But, without a GPS, or sometimes in the case of destinations in new areas where the device just doesn't work, what's the recourse? Well, there actually is something called a "map" (a personal favorite of mine, as a life-long Girl Scout). And, if you are desperate, you can always ask for directions.

Directions...just the thought makes me chuckle. Why, you ask? It's my husband. The man absolutely loathes getting driving directions from others. You see, one of two things tend to happen to him when directions are involved. He's likely to get a well-intentioned direction-giver who's so familiar with how to drive home or to work or to that other oft-travelled location that the person omits essential navigational elements, leaving him on the west side of nowhere. At the other end of the spectrum is the direction-giver who offers every landmark and notes every passing street, yielding a 5-page set of instructions that's impossible to read and follow while still being a responsible driver. Given that, you can understand why, when I hear him on the phone using that now-familiar phrase, "Just give me the address..." I make a quick exit in order to avoid laughing openly and adding to the frustration of the moment.

The good thing is that, with a street address in hand, there's always some way to figure out where to go -- GPS, hard-copy map, online driving directions, even the folks at the gas station or convenience store when you get close to your destination. But, what do you do in the workplace when you have no sense of where you need to go and your leader isn't providing adequate direction? That's the question raised by an **EA Insights** reader that we'll tackle this month. So, read on, and learn some tips for coping when you're got a visionless leader.

All the best,

*June*

June Melvin Mickens  
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## The Plight of the Visionless Leader

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I hope this is not you, but I'm sure you know someone who took, or has stayed with, a job simply because of the paycheck or the prestige involved with the position.

On the other hand, there are others (and I hope this IS you) who took, or has stayed with, a job because of the ability to contribute to something of value...to make a difference, in some positive way, to the world.

Whether people come to a workplace motivated or not, one of the primary responsibilities of the leader, the person who meets them at the door, is to do just that -- inspire. It's the leader's job to awaken in people the passion, creative thinking, collaboration, and much more that will propel them to become invested in making the organization, and its work, count.

What's the key to creating a culture of inspiration? It's summed up in a single word -- **vision**. Vision is the development of a mental picture of what your organization will be or how the world will be changed because of what you offer. Vision is clarifying; it's sorting through diverse interpretations and ideas, and it's fashioning a common understanding of what can be. And, vision is uniting; it's linking people not only around that shared understanding, but through a commitment to lend their collective efforts to transforming that vision into reality.

### Three Patterns of Visionless Leaders

In challenged organizations (that is, in organizations in which people are **un**inspired and they're feeling as if the leadership is vision-less), one of three patterns is likely to emerge.

**Pattern #1: No Vision** -- It is true. Some leaders have no vision. How does this happen?

On rare occasion, one finds a leader who hasn't learned how to dream. Everything has been so scripted for him or her up to this point that just letting go, and being free to envision what should be or what could be, is not just uncomfortable; it's foreign.

More frequently found, though, is the no-vision leader who's had

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### "Quotes"

*"I was very impressed with what he had to say. He talked about all the positive things and pointed his finger at the future in a very complimentary way. This is his moment to share his vision, and I thought he presented that vision very well."*  
~Kim Bradley

*"The only limits are, as always, those of vision."*  
~James Broughton

*"The key is to have a vision[.]"*  
~Peter Clark

*"He's the reason we're all here. He has an incredible vision about what this should be."*  
~Susan DeFife

*"I'm so motivated to collaborate with people and help them realize the kind of collective vision."*  
~Rachel Griffiths

*"Leaders need to be optimists. Their vision is beyond the present."*  
~Rudy Giuliani

*"It's all about the same thing, being able to pull people into a situation where you have a vision, and transport that vision off the page."*  
~Taylor Hackford

*"Every moment is a golden one for him who has the vision to recognize it as such."*  
~Henry Miller

*"Strategic planning is worthless -- unless there is first*



thenecessary squashed by the *urgent*. This is the leader who's so busy putting out today's fires, or so deep into the weeds of tactical work, that a critical leadership piece suffers. This leader fails to step back periodically, gain perspective, and plan for the future. And so, the fires continue to ignite or smolder, and the weeds grow thicker by the day, because there's nobody attending to the big picture.

**Pattern #2: Changing Vision** -- Some environments that appear to be vision-less really are not. The problem isn't an *absence* of vision; it's *aconstantly changing* vision. If people need a scorecard to keep track of the organization's direction from day-to-day, it will be hard for them to rally around it and invest in it.

**Pattern #3: Uncommunicated Vision** -- What good is having a vision, if nobody knows what it is? When you get right down to it, vision that is not communicated, for all practical purposes, is akin to no vision at all.

Leaders who have done the heavy lifting of developing a direction are to be applauded. However, that's only one step in the process. Visioning gains its value, not by keeping it close to the vest, but by sharing it with others and using it to inspire them to become a part of actualizing that vision. Thus, a leader's communication (and, I might add, *repeated* communication) of the vision is critical.

### Transforming a Visionless Environment

How do you cope, if you find yourself in a vision-deprived environment? That answer depends on the seat in which you sit.

#### Leaders

If you're the leader in that environment, the good news is that you've got options. First, understand that you don't have to remain vision-deprived. There are resources available (like **Executive Advantage**) that can help you create, clarify, and/or communicate a picture of your organization's future so that it becomes a useful tool for you and for those around you.

Second, recognize that you have untapped resources that are just waiting for your direction. The fact that you have staff members still on the rolls, even without a clear vision, means that they see something, and have some level of investment, in your business on which you can build for the future.

#### Staff Members

While the easy road is to lay the entire responsibility for absent or poorly articulated vision at the feet of your leader, there actually are things every staff member can do to bring some level of clarity to a vision-challenged environment.

**1. Ask** -- Sounds simple? It is. If the leader of your team, department, or organization hasn't shared vision with you, or what has been shared isn't clear, there's no reason why you can't ask. Sometimes people don't realize that they haven't downloaded information to team members, or they think they've done so clearly, and they won't know otherwise unless someone comes forward and raises awareness. While some leaders may differ with me on this, I would take it as a sign of initiative and investment if a staff member sought time with me to discuss organizational direction (not in a challenging or accusatory manner, but with sincere interest). And, that discussion would demonstrate added engagement if peppered with inquiries and thoughts about how he or she best fits into advancing the plans.

**2. Participate** -- I understand that, for some, scheduling time with the boss to talk vision may be a bit awkward. However, that doesn't mean that you must resign yourself to a directionless future. Instead, seek out the needed information in other ways.

Organizations produce annual reports, newsletters, marketing materials, and a range of other products throughout the year for staff, for the board, for investors, and/or for the public. Read them; don't just trash them. In their pages is a wealth of information about where your organization is going. Also, many organizations have periodic all-staff, department, and other live, video, or audio meetings where direction is shared. Attend, listen, and ask questions. Again, these are excellent opportunities to fill in information gaps that will allow you to understand what's going on and to make informed decisions about the contributions you can make.

Visionless leadership? Maybe...maybe not. Either way, it's not a situation that a leader or any staff member is relegated to forever.

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*a strategic vision."*  
~John Naisbitt

*"Operating under one umbrella will unify our operations, help us work more efficiently and elevate the level of service we provide to our existing and future clients. We're very excited to see our vision take its next shape."*  
~John McNeil

*"Have a vision. Be demanding."*  
~Colin Powell

*"To grasp and hold a vision, that is the very essence of successful leadership -- not only on the movie set where I learned it, but everywhere."*  
~Ronald Reagan

*"But if the vision is strong enough, and your goals are steady, and you believe, pretty soon you bring other people with you."*  
~Mike Rounds

*"I've been blessed to find people who are smarter than I am, and they help me to execute the vision I have."*  
~Russell Simmons

*"A vision without a task is but a dream. A task without a vision is drudgery. A vision with a task is the hope of the world."*  
~Unknown

*"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results."*  
~Unknown

## What Should We Cover?



Do you have questions or topics that you'd like to have us cover in an upcoming issue of EA Insights?

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At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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