

Why Leaders Must Connect The Dots

What They Can't See, They Won't Accomplish

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Vision. Whether it is a blessing or a curse is open for debate, but what isn't debatable is that vision is an essential component of effective leadership. Sadly, visionless leadership is in no short supply. Therefore, neither are its consequences. The caveats regarding this deficiency are abundant in source and supply. Even the Ancient Hebrew Script warns us, "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

Yesterday, I was in a bookstore and came across an intriguing children's workbook filled with connect the dot worksheets and puzzles. Some of the worksheets were very simple and it was easy to figure out what the picture depicted even without drawing the lines and connecting the dots. But that wasn't true for the majority of the actives and exercises in the book. Honestly, it turned out that on most of the pages, I couldn't see the forest for the trees. However, I noticed as soon as I had a hint regarding the shapes and sizes of items in the picture, things immediately begin to pop off the page.

As I continued to thumb through the workbook it dawned on me that leaders often see, and see first, those things others need help to perceive. Leaders must connect the dots for their associates, in order to create a joint and shared vision.

The leader has the responsibility to see and make sense of a complex matrix of dots. Then, out of that imposing and chaotic constellation of dots, the leader must help his or her team and constituents to see the same shapes and forms. It goes without saying, that if they don't see it; the probability of them investing the initiative, creativity, and energy, required to achieve the goal is obviously adversely impacted, if not, significantly impeded.

Here are three strategies to help your direct reports and key stakeholders see the same picture you see:

Clarify For Self. The first step in creating a shared vision is to first clarify the vision for yourself. It is impossible to bring others along if you don't have some idea where you are leading them and why. It is also very difficult to sell the benefits of the new vision if you aren't crystal clear as to what the new vision actually entails. Get clear first, and then you'll be ready to share.

Give Them A Clue. The infamous Rorschach inkblot test has shown that without a predetermined frame of reference, ambiguous shapes are open to a multiplicity of interpretations. Unfortunately, when it comes to sharing a vision, ambiguous and inconsistent interpretations are the hallmark of fail projects and derailed careers.

Number The Dots. The popular saying, "Begin with the end in mind," is often misrepresented behaviorally when leaders present only the end product (their vision), with little regard for or explanation of the steps required to bring the vision to fruition. The associates and direct reports need to be guided through the same process of discovery as employed by the leader. To simply present the "ideal state future state" and expect other to intuitively "get it" is to exacerbate resistance and slow progress.

These three strategies are exceptionally important in creating and leveraging a shared vision within your organization. The leaders who employ these strategies will be rewarded, many times over, by the increased optimism, initiative, and productivity of those they lead, manage, or supervise.

Creating a shared vision is not just the first step in transforming an organizational culture, it is non-negotiable. Far too often leaders rush to implementation before they have established a shared vision amongst key associates and stakeholders. Such a miscalculation will always show up in the cost of doing business. It shows up in missed deadlines, poor quality, and cost overruns. Taking the time to connect the dots ensures the leader is truly maximizing the organization's investment in human capital.

Leadership Lesson: Vision is powerful, but a shared vision is unsupportable. It is not enough for the leader to be consumed by "the vision," those involved and invested in the process must also be consumed by – the same vision. If there isn't a joint vision, it stands to reason, that all future activities requiring cooperation and collaboration are destined to overburden by posturing, politicking, and painfully slow progress.

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