



NO RED CAPES
LEADERSHIP JOURNAL

Resource

Overcoming the Half-Life of Vision



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Overcoming the half-life of Vision

by Gary Mayes

Understanding the concept of a half-life: *simple...*
Recognizing its impact on those you lead: *profound...*
Knowing it was birthed out of a parallel to radioactivity: *ominous.*

The point? “Vision has a half-life of seven days!”

A half-life of seven days means the potency of your vision in the minds and motivations of your people diminishes by half every week. It also means that in a mere 28 days what was originally powerful will be impotent. Here’s what I mean:

-  **DAY ONE:** Imagine you have just accomplished heroic success defining and communicating vision for your people. However you measure your success, right now your vision has maximum potency. Consider this your baseline, the level of understanding, buy-in, and motivated response at this moment.
-  **DAY EIGHT:** A week has gone by, but already the strength of vision that lives and breathes in your people is only half as potent as it was initially. What was 100% a week ago has eroded by 50% in 7 days.
-  **DAY FIFTEEN:** 14 days in and you’ve lost another half-life. That means, the level of buy-in which was so strong two weeks ago is now only 25% of its former self.
-  **DAY TWENTY-TWO:** You are now down to a level of buy-in, understanding, and motivated alignment that is a meager 12.5% of what you started with three weeks ago.
-  **DAY TWENTY-NINE:** Do the math. At 6.75% of original strength your vision is living on fumes. No leader would ever launch anything of significance with such a pathetic level of buy-in. Yet, the disturbing truth is, you got here in *only 28 days!* You didn’t do anything wrong, it is just the reality of vision’s half-life.



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Make you nervous? ...Discouraged? Does it explain some of the frustration you have felt at different times? Granted, some people might have a personal vision half-life which is longer than seven days,

but the principle holds true in the life of an organization. One way or another, vision must be re-communicated and re-anchored in the lives of your people every month.

However, this monthly pattern is rare, to our own detriment.

Typical vision messaging revolves around a big launch or an annual push. It may include a series of written articles, unveiling of new logo, refreshed branding effort, creative video presentation, a series of vision talks, new “company shirts,” or some combination of all the above. Then after all the hoopla, we stop talking about it and move on assuming that people “got it.”

Once you understand the effect of vision’s half-life, it makes sense that the annual vision campaign never adequately infects the motivation, behavior, and decision-making of your staff all year long. It should be no surprise that the vision etched onto the plaque in your lobby fails to be noticed after a week or two.

What if it were possible to create greater buy-in and familiarity without needing to pull-off a communication extravaganza? What if vision ownership were the result of simple, but consistent actions every month? It is not only possible, it is essential.

The key to anchoring vision in the minds and behaviors of your people is to combine a variety of approaches with a consistency of effort. Repeating the same words in the same format is not going to get the job done. Redundant communication becomes nothing more than background noise, so you cannot say or do things the same way every time and expect to be heard.

There are so many ways to reinforce vision, let me get some of your own ideas working by suggesting some different ways to revisit vision.



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Simple Ways to Reinforce Vision:

- Publicly tell the story of someone whose behavior exemplifies your vision or the story of someone who changed their behavior because of your vision.
- When making announcements, “connect the dots” between a planned program or initiative and the broader vision by the way you talk about it. i.e. ***“This effort grows directly out of our vision to _____.”*** (see “*Leaders Connect the Dots,*” a [es.com">www.noredcapes.com](http://www.noredcap<span style=) resource, posted April 2008.)

- Evaluate the progress or disappointment of an initiative against your vision and then report on that evaluation to everyone. Measuring failure means you take the vision seriously.
- Make heroes out of those who sacrifice for the sake of your vision.
- Laugh publicly at your vision-inspired-failures. Admit mistakes but applaud effort. True vision always calls for new (and sometimes rocky) efforts.
- Invite different people to voice their commitment and personalized understanding of the vision.
- Interview families who are changing their lifestyles to align with your vision.
- Ask department heads to talk about ways their goals, plans, or programs are being informed by the vision.

I remember the day I learned my lesson. As a local church pastor, I had the practice of doing an annual vision Sunday. To me it was a big deal and I'd say that most of the time I did a decent job. I have learned a lot more about the nature of vision since then, but even so, it was a worthy effort.

After a few years I thought people had really bought in. I thought we were on the same page, that my people got it. Then one day a couple of my leaders challenged a proposal of mine. I thought the plan was a perfect fit for our vision, but they couldn't even remember what our vision was. Hey, I had preached about it just seven or eight months earlier and a the year before that. What's the problem?

Now I get it. The fundamental problem is that the potency of vision erodes at a frightening rate. It is the problem of vision's half-life.

Two immediate questions for you,

1. *How well are you doing these days at consistently reinforcing your vision in different ways? and,*
2. *What are you going to do about it?*

A suggestion. Gather your leadership team together and work through the discussion guide on the next page.



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[Be honest as a group of leaders and discuss your way through the following questions. Take a risk and see what you discover together.]

Assessing Our Pattern:

1. When is the last time we did an extensive presentation of our vision? *and* What methods did we use?
2. How often do we intentionally review the clarity and potency of your vision?
 - a. *What is our method for evaluating the adequacy of our vision?*
 - b. *What kind of buy-in are we getting from people?*
 - c. *In what ways do we evaluate progress toward our vision?*

Creating a New Way Forward:

1. **Brainstorm:** Create a list of as many ideas as possible for how you might communicate and reinforce vision.
 - a. *Review the ideas in this article. What else could we do?*
 - b. *Give yourselves ten minutes, use a white board, and make the goal quantity not quality.*
 - c. *Be outlandish. Have fun. Embrace crazy ideas, they often release fresh thinking.*
2. **Choose Six:** Combining the list in this article as well as our additional ideas, which six ideas best fit your situation?
3. **Make Real Plans:** Use these six ideas as an outline for vision reinforcement over the next six months.
 - a. *Right now, look at your calendar and assign one method to each of the next six months.*
 - b. *Right now, assign one person to be responsible to execute each idea. (They will handle any necessary research, enlisting help/ generating creative ideas, etc.)*
 - c. *Calendar an evaluation meeting at two and four months. At your four month evaluation, repeat the process for the next six months.*



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