

Get employee buy-in for your vision

BY BONNI CARSON DIMATTEO, CMC

Research tells us that we learn in many different ways. We retain just 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, and 50% of what we see and hear. Moving up the scale, we retain 70% of what we discuss and 95% of what we share and communicate to others.

This information is important when it comes to understanding how leaders need to communicate their company's vision to employees in a way that leads to employee acceptance of a vision. It's a leader's responsibility to set the tone and create passion for the vision. Here are a few starting points to help leaders begin a process that results in employee buy-in:

- Create the vision by telling a company story that sets the rationale – the economic, psychological and moral imperative to fulfill this vision.
- Foster excitement, motivation, and engagement around the vision by articulating the WIFM (What's In It For Me) factor. Let your employees know how they will benefit from embracing the vision. Explain and reinforce the financial rewards when the goals of the vision have been achieved, such as bonuses, recognition, and career development.
- Share the vision frequently through staff meetings, outings, newsletters, emails, posters and employee campaigns.
- Develop visuals, such as tables, charts and photos, which highlight milestone accomplishments of the vision.
- Create and align company goals with the vision, and align individual and team goals with company goals.
- Identify a cross-functional change management team that can anticipate the impact of the vision on the current workflow and that can devise new work strategies and systems around the vision.
- Talk it up. Make time and create opportunities to communicate the vision with key players, key teams, and all stakeholders.
- Celebrate meaningful benchmarks along the way.

To see how this process works in action, consider the case of a mid-sized manufacturer that was coping with leadership changes and communications problems at the very time it was anticipating faster growth. Company leaders knew they had to create a vision that employees would rally behind.

To begin the process, Atlantic Consultants held an all-day facilitated off-site retreat to identify "5 on 5": Five Roadblocks that thwart the vision and Five Opportunities that contribute

to achieving it. After the 5 on 5 were identified, five cross-functional action teams were identified to create the solutions to 5 on 5. Each team had five weeks to come up with solutions, and the team with the highest number of action plans was recognized and rewarded. Next, these solutions were transferred to the High Five, a cross-functional change management team that had the responsibility to implement the most effective solutions from the combined lists.

All these steps have boosted communication and collaboration at the company. Employee morale and job satisfaction also have increased, and people have been rewarded with promotions as new opportunities have occurred.

A recent survey by the American Society of Training and Development found that the three reasons people stay with a company are: (1) recognition; (2) career development; and (3) financial rewards. As a leader, make sure your vision addresses these critical areas. In other words, find ways to include employee satisfaction and retention in your vision. This will create the buy-in to make your vision a reality throughout the company.

In the final analysis, it's not only about the number of widgets a company produces or how widespread the company's reputation is. Just as important to company success is the positive impact that a company's vision has on the hearts and lives of employees, the most valuable asset.

BUSINESS TIPS



*Bonni Carson DiMatteo is founder and president of Atlantic Consultants in Wellesley and the author of the forthcoming book, *Coaching Leaders to the Next Level*.*