THE VISON DR VEN LEADER

10 QUESTIONS TO FOCUS
YOUR EFFORTS, ENERGIZE YOUR TEAM,
AND SCALE YOUR BUSINESS

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PART 1

VISION DRIVES EVERYTHING

The ability to envision possibilities for the future and share that vision with others distinguishes leaders from nonleaders.

HERMINIA IBARRA

What defines a good leader? Enabling other people to step into the unseen.

BEAU LOTTO

A leader has the vision and conviction that a dream can be achieved. He inspires the power and energy to get it done.

RALPH LAUREN

QUESTION 1

Are You a Leader or a Manager?

The Cost of Confusion

Those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.

JOHN F. KENNEDY¹

grew up at the dawn of the space age. My school years were full of Tom Swift books and dreams of interplanetary travel. I geeked out on science and technology, saw every movie I could, read every comic book I could, and spent countless hours drawing spaceships of my own, meticulously adding every necessary detail for the galactic voyages I hoped to make. I wanted to be an astronaut. But it wasn't just sci-fi that lit my rockets. America was then in the midst of a very real space race.

The Soviet Union started things off by launching the world's first satellite, Sputnik 1, in October 1957. I was a little more than two years old at the time. Then in April

1961, when I was almost six, Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human to orbit Earth. It was a tremendous achievement, but we Americans were in no mood to celebrate.

During the height of the Cold War, tensions were stratospheric. At best, Soviet success in space spelled a loss of American prestige. At worst, it posed an existential threat. American school students my age and older were required to participate in "duck and cover" drills under their desks in case of a nuclear attack. Backyard bomb shelters were all the rage. As the arms race intensified, everyone was asking, What if the Russians could weaponize space? Americans needed to respond. But how?

Though the Soviets had the upper hand, US president John F. Kennedy viewed space as a critical Cold War battle-ground. His predecessor disagreed. President Dwight Eisenhower only begrudgingly established NASA and funded the Mercury program. Eisenhower's reluctance was understandable but resulted in the Soviets going farther, faster than the US, and as one writer put it, "added to the national inferiority complex" Americans felt.²

Kennedy was convinced America could not afford to cede more ground to the Soviet Union. So six weeks after Gagarin's flight, he stood before a joint session of Congress and made the biggest sales pitch of his presidency. "Now it is time... for this nation to take a clearly leading role in space achievement, which in many ways may hold the key to our future on earth," he said before outlining his specific goal:

I believe that this nation should commit itself to . . . landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth. No single space project in this period will be more impressive to mankind, or more important for the long-range exploration of space; and none will be so difficult or expensive to accomplish.... It will not be one man going to the moon—if we make this judgment affirmatively, it will be an entire nation. For all of us must work to put him there.³

Many at the time considered Kennedy's vision delusional. They doubted we could land on the moon with the available technology and know-how—let alone bring an astronaut back alive. Eisenhower called Kennedy's announcement "hysterical," and viewed his "spectacular dash to the moon" as "nuts" and a "stunt." NASA's first administrator, T. Keith Glennan, was equally unsupportive. He called the president's plan "a very bad move." 5

Public disbelief and criticism remained as the project progressed. From June 1961 through July 1967, pollsters asked the public: "Would you favor or oppose US government spending to send astronauts to the Moon?" Less than half of the public was in favor, excluding one month during my tenth year when the majority opinion briefly swung toward the moon shot.⁶

Thankfully, Kennedy knew what every vision-driven leader knows: if the vision is compelling enough, people will apply their best thinking and efforts to figure it out, regardless of the obstacles and opposition. Kennedy called upon "every scientist, every engineer, every serviceman, every technician, contractor, and civil servant [to give] his personal pledge that this nation will move forward, with the full speed of freedom, in the exciting adventure of space." Despite the naysayers, people stepped up to transform the president's vision to reality.

The effort faced incredible challenges and catastrophic setbacks, and though Kennedy was not alive to celebrate

If the vision is compelling enough, people will apply their best thinking and efforts to figure it out, regardless of the obstacles and opposition.

the achievement, on July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong emerged from Apollo 11 and became the first man to set foot on the moon. He even did it ahead of schedule. I had turned fourteen the month before, and I don't recall ever having been more elated, more amazed, than I was at that moment.

Armstrong safely splashed down in the Pacific on July 24, but despite my elation, the hard truth is it took a lot longer for the real lesson of the moon shot to land for me. Like countless kids my age, I eventually traded my desire to become an astronaut for the dream of starting a business. Armstrong's moonwalk testified to what a leader's vision can accomplish. But even though that lesson unfolded before my adolescent eyes, it took the catastrophic failure of my first business years later to teach me what Kennedy showed the entire world.

I'll tell you that story in the coming pages, along with what I did to rebound, but first let me just say this. In the decades following that failure, I've come back to successfully lead teams and companies. I've been an executive, and I've coached executives. And through all those experiences, I've discovered something else: I'm far from the only leader who has struggled with vision.

The Vision Thing

Whenever I reflect on the success of Kennedy's moon shot, I can't help but compare it with the story of another American president.

George H. W. Bush had a reputation for lacking vision. In 1987, he was running for office and knew he needed a way to connect with voters. He asked a colleague to identify some issues that would resonate. Not so fast, said the friend.

According to *Time*, instead of providing a litany of winning issues, he "suggested that Bush go alone to Camp David for a few days to figure out where he wanted to take the country."

"Oh," responded Bush, unimpressed by the idea, "the vision thing." Bush possessed many positive qualities but saw taking time to craft a vision as pointless, uninteresting, or too difficult. It wasn't his thing. And that cost him. Rightly or wrongly, critics saw Bush as a yes-man with little presence or power of his own. "What does Bush really stand for?" asked reporter Margaret Garrard Warner in a provocative cover story for *Newsweek* entitled "Bush Battles the 'Wimp Factor." He was, she said, "by and large a politician without a political identity."

Thanks in part to hard campaigning and a soft opponent, Bush managed to win the election, but observers noted that the lack of "the vision thing" plagued his presidency. Kennedy had the luxury of an intolerable situation; Russia's aggressive stance forced a creative response. But when faced with his own challenges—including an economic recession and changing global landscape—Bush failed to chart a compelling course for the country.

Some believed he lacked the strength or courage to lead. They saw him as a manager, not a leader, and that perception ultimately undermined his 1992 reelection bid. ¹⁰ Unable to cast a vision of a profitable economy or America's role in a post–Cold War world, Bush failed to get the votes.

Vision is the essential ingredient for successful leadership. There's no substitute. Without it, influence fades along with the crowds. This is especially true in business. Unless you, as a leader, have a clear picture of the destination where you want your company to be in three to five years, you've got nothing that will inspire people to follow you. "Lead-

ers create things that didn't exist before," Seth Godin says. "They do this by giving the tribe a vision of something that could happen, but hasn't (yet)."¹¹

This is the primary difference between leaders and managers. When asked by *Harvard Business Review*, "What makes

a good manager?" GE's legendary chairman and CEO Jack Welch responded with a crucial clarification. "I prefer the term 'business leader," he said. "Good business leaders create a vision, articulate the vision, passionately own the vision, and relentlessly drive it to completion." 12

Vision is the essential ingredient for successful leadership.

Voters expected Bush to act like a leader; instead, he behaved like a manager. Both

roles are important, but they are fundamentally different and require different dispositions and skill sets. Leaders create vision, while managers execute vision. Leaders inspire and motivate, while managers maintain and administer. Leaders take risks, while managers control risks. Leaders stay focused on the horizon, while managers have their eye on short-term goals and objectives. "The manager is the classic good soldier," as pioneering leadership-studies author Warren Bennis said; whereas, "the leader is his or her own person."¹³

There are significant consequences for getting these backward. Research conducted by the Corporate Executive Board noted an uptick in dysfunctional decision-making within organizations among managers. "Today's organizations require an average of 5.4 managers reaching consensus to make a decision," they found, elaborating,

The 5.4 typically hail from different functional areas within the company and often have conflicting goals, motivations, and perspectives. . . . In that type of environment, the result is not bad decision-making—it's no decision-making whatso-ever, keeping the status quo. The second alternative chosen by the 5.4 is to proceed with the least risky, lowest-cost path forward. Quality and customer impact take a backseat to price. ¹⁴

You'll never get to the moon like that. "Leadership," as Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's celebrated chief operating officer, says, "is the art of accomplishing more than the science of management teaches you is possible." And that, she says, requires a vision "that can take you from where you are to the more-than-foreseeable future." ¹⁵

So how do I define this essential ingredient?

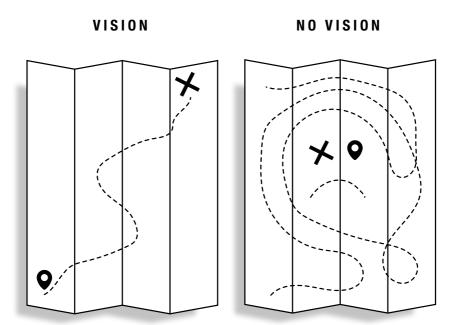
Leaders	Managers
Create and cast vision	Receive and execute vision
Inspire and motivate	Maintain and administer
Weigh and take risks	Control and minimize risks
Focus on the long term	Focus on the short term

THE LEADER-MANAGER DIFFERENTIAL

The Essential Ingredient

Vision, as I see it, is a clear, inspiring, practical, and attractive picture of your organization's future. It doesn't have to be ten or twenty years down the road, though that might be helpful. I'm talking about an imagined future—usually just three to five years out—superior to the present, which motivates you, which guides day-to-day strategy and decision-making, and around which your team can rally.

Without this, you're effectively voting for the status quo. Your organization doesn't need a leader unless they want to



Vision is the difference between knowing where you're going and traveling in circles.

change. It doesn't take a leader to maintain the status quo. A competent manager will do just fine. If, however, you find the status quo unacceptable and want to focus your efforts, energize your team, and scale your business, you must be a vision-driven leader.

That is what this book is all about. By formulating a compelling vision of the future, as Kennedy did, leaders can achieve what was previously considered impossible. They can develop meaningful strategies, attract A-plus talent, and take their organizations to new and exciting places. But for many leaders, it's not as easy or straightforward as it sounds. You might be one of them, and I really can't blame you.

In his book What You Don't Know About Leadership but Probably Should, Baylor professor Jeffrey Kottler defines vision as the "initial task" of leaders.¹⁷ It's the first thing, the top priority.

But in my experience as the chairman and chief executive officer of Thomas Nelson Publishers, one of the world's largest English-language publishers before its 2011 acquisition by HarperCollins, and now as the CEO of my own leadership-coaching company, I find many leaders are more like Bush than Kennedy.

Through no fault of their own, they're often dismissive of, confused about, and ill-equipped to create compelling visions for their organizations. Why? Let's roll through these three problems as we move toward the solution.

1. Leaders downplay the need. Bush was impatient with developing his vision, and I see that same tendency among some of the business owners and executives I've coached over the years. I even worked for a CEO like that. He wouldn't make time for vision. He didn't think it was his strength or even his responsibility.

Instead, he appointed a committee, put me in charge of it, and said, "You guys do the vision thing. Come up with a vision for where we're going, and then let me know what you've decided." Instead of sending us off on our own, he could have—should have—joined us at the table. If he had, his executives could have asked him the kind of probing questions necessary to arrive at a vision he could endorse, the sorts of questions upon which this book is based. More on that in a moment.

My old boss is not alone. Contemporary leadership suffers from a vision deficit. According to one study of 466 companies, respondents identified the following as one of the top-felt corporate deficiencies: "Leaders who can create a compelling

vision and engage others around it." What's more, that "need was both a top priority *and* also perceived as the most lacking competency in next-generation leaders." Similarly, in her work analyzing hundreds of 360-degree managerial assessments, INSEAD professor Herminia Ibarra says vision is one leadership skill in which most subjects come up short. 19

A large number of leaders view vision as secondary. That's because there's an action bias inherent to leadership. Execution, after all, is right there in the word—*executive*. These leaders limit their job to effective execution of their current objectives. That's necessary, but insufficient. Execution is just part of the picture. Without a destination and the people to follow you there, you might be busy, but you're not busy leading your company.

Part of this can be explained because leaders haven't been coached on the benefits and payoff that being vision-driven brings to their organization. Author Suzanna Bates observes, "Confidence and Vision paired together breed a distinct kind of optimism in an organization. They ignite a sense that it's okay to take a risk, try something new, and push ahead. When confident leaders express a frame-changing vision, they inspire those around them to take bold action." ²⁰

One of the things we have to do as leaders is to create or point to a larger purpose and story. Our teams want something that requires their best effort, that requires innovation in their thinking, that inspires their imagination. And it's up to us to ask ourselves, Does what we're trying to do as an organization create that kind of inspiration? Is it something that's challenging, or just business as usual?

2. Leaders are confused about vision. One reason there's such an absence of vision-driven leadership these days stems

from a misunderstanding about vision. As you'll see in Question 3, vision is not the same as mission. Nor is it the same as strategy, something we'll cover in Question 6.

Vision is an act of seeing what the future could be, and then articulating that potential in an inspiring, clear, practical, and attractive way—what I call a Vision Script—which the leader's teams can then follow into the future. That's what vision-driven leaders like George Eastman did with photography, Henry Ford did with the automobile, and Steve Jobs did with personal computing. They instinctively knew that people are looking for something to believe in, an outcome to embrace, a winning aspiration.

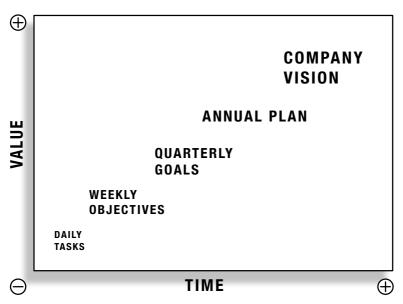
Leaders also make the mistake of thinking of vision as a static quality or a quirk of personality; either you have a powerful vision, like Kennedy, or you don't, like Bush. But a compelling vision of the future is really something anyone can develop if they know how. And it's something vital to develop, because our ultimate success and failure is on the line. You'll be glad to know the questions in this book will point the way.

When we have a compelling, unifying view of the future, and when we communicate it to the team with passion and purpose, it can motivate people to accomplish astonishing things. Those who lack vision—or, more to the point, won't give it the proper attention—are unready for the challenge of leadership.

I've witnessed this transformative power of vision while coaching thousands of business leaders to win at work and succeed at life. But a vision will work only if you're willing to do the necessary work to craft one. Kennedy did the heavy lifting of getting clear on what he wanted, and America responded by doing the impossible. I wonder if Bush ever regretted skipping that trip to Camp David.

3. Leaders don't feel equipped. One of the reasons leaders downplay vision or don't see the need for it is self-protection. They feel ill-equipped to create and cast a compelling picture of the future. Like my old boss, the prospect leaves them feeling uncomfortable or worse.

No one enjoys doing something that feels foreign to their skill set, but this challenge is especially tough for leaders. Why? Because we assume they're supposed to have all the answers. They're supposed to be the most competent, the most in command. When leaders come up short on vision, it's like admitting a weakness or a shortcoming. It seems easier to downplay "the vision thing" and jump to tasks at which they excel: strategy, execution, team building, whatever.



If you, as a leader, compare the relative time horizons, daily and weekly tasks can feel more important than your vision—it's so far out there! But if you look at the relative value, working on your vision stands out as the most important task on a leader's list. In Question 6, I'll show how these activities work together.

At Michael Hyatt & Co., we conduct leadership-coaching intensives through our Business Accelerator program. I often hear from men and women who started a business or found themselves promoted into positions of responsibility and now feel the pressure to level up. They know that involves vision, but they feel unprepared. Some feel as if they're imposters—as if it's only a matter of time before they're found out and lose it all.

I've been there. I get it. And there's a simple reason for the prevalence of this feeling. They've never had the coaching to create a compelling picture of the future, something desirable, exciting, and challenging to motivate their teams. If that's you, I've got good news. *The Vision Driven Leader* will show you how to craft a compelling vision and use it to guide your company forward with intention and energy.

Your Plan for Vision-Driven Success

You picked up this book because you're either a leader, or you aspire to be one. *The Vision Driven Leader* is organized around a series of ten questions to help you create and cast your vision; make it clear, inspiring, and practical; sell it to your team; and weather the challenges ahead.

Together, the questions work like a diagnostic tool to help you focus on what matters and get the answers you need to channel your efforts, energize your team, and grow your business bigger than you ever thought possible. These questions also function like the interlocking parts of a proven vision-crafting system; address them honestly and you'll leave with a powerful vision you can deploy in your organization. Let me briefly walk you through each before we explore them in depth in the pages ahead.

Question 1: Are you a leader or a manager? As you already know from reading this far, both roles are valuable and necessary for any business to succeed. But, as you also know, they're very different roles. Leaders and managers view the world and approach their work through different lenses. By confusing these roles, companies drift, struggle, and eventually fail.

Question 2: What difference does vision make? Next, we'll discover the six pitfalls of vision-deficit leaders. Don't worry if some hit close to home. They sure did for me, especially early in my career. In this question, I'll reveal how I learned the value of vision in one of the hardest ways possible—my own colossal business failure. Absent future focus, leaders frustrate their teams and waste precious resources, time, and talent; we'll look at one company, for instance, that burned through \$900 million in funding before folding because they had no clear vision of the future.

Question 3: What do you want? Here we'll differentiate mission and vision, and I'll share how vision helped me salvage a dying division when I unexpectedly found myself as the head of the department. We'll cover three tips for composing a powerful Vision Script around four interrelated futures: the future of your team, the future of your products, the future of your sales and marketing efforts, and the future of the impact that your company can have on the world.

Question 4: Is it clear? Now that you've identified what you want, the next step is to ensure what's in your head is clear so you can effectively communicate it. Here I'll guide you through the three land mines to avoid when addressing your team: namely, intuitive, confusing, and flat-out foggy communication. Clarity comes when your vision is concrete rather than abstract and your communication is explicit

rather than implicit. I'll share a simple model, the Vision Grid, to help visualize what true clarity involves.

Question 5: Does it inspire? If your Vision Script doesn't fire your rockets, you won't be able to help your team reach liftoff—and some might not even join you on the launchpad. That's why, after clarity, it's essential your vision be inspiring to you and others. You'll learn the value of focusing on what isn't rather than on what is. You'll see the benefit of an exponential vision over an incremental vision. We'll discuss the difference between a vision that's risky and one that's just plain stupid. And we'll also see why your Vision Script should focus on what you envision, not how you're going to get it done.

Question 6: Is it practical? A compelling vision does more than imagine a desired future. It's practical enough to guide your actions in the present, particularly in two key areas: your plan and your people. Without it, you'll hire poorly, work aimlessly, and fill the weeks and months with meaningless activity instead of the kind of focused effort it takes to reach your destination.

Question 7: Can you sell it? The surest test of your Vision Script is whether you can sell it to your team. When you first craft your vision, it's wet cement. You need to involve key stakeholders before it's finalized and before you roll it out companywide. This requires a bit of a dance. Here I'll help you sell it up the chain, down the chain, across the organization, and even outside of the company. Without that, you won't have your intended impact.

Question 8: How should you face resistance? Every vision encounters resistance. It's inherent to the act of taking what isn't and bringing it into being. But, as a colleague of mine used to say, "If it was easy, they wouldn't need us."

Your contribution is valuable precisely because the work of change is challenging. Here I provide four tactics to keep going in the face of resistance as well as three character traits to combat resistance: *tenacity* in the face of rejection, *integrity* when tested by compromise, and *courage* in the face of what I call the drift. I'll share a story here about an obstacle that almost derailed my entire comeback effort. Resistance is part of realizing any vision. The vision-driven leader accepts this as part of the journey on the way to their desired future.

Question 9: Is it too late? Behind this question lurks the nagging feeling for some that the window has already closed on becoming a vision-driven leader. It hasn't, and I'll share two concepts to prove it: the Vision Arc and the Vision Zag. As companies like Marvel, LEGO, Amazon, Microsoft, and Slack show, it's never too late to launch a new and winning vision.

Question 10: Are you ready? The statistics on entrepreneurialism in this country are not encouraging at the moment. I like to think by the time you reach the end of our journey together, you'll have everything you need to ignite your inner JFK, become a vision-driven leader, and change those numbers for the better. I'll wrap up with five simple steps to help you succeed in developing and delivering a Vision Script that will help you and your organization thrive in a new and better future.

If you'd like a little extra help in drafting your Vision Script, I've created a free new interactive tool called the Vision Scripter to get clear on your vision, draft your Vision Script, and then share it with your team. It uses video coaching, questions, and cues to make writing a compelling vision simple and easy. Check it out at VisionDrivenLeader.com.

What's Your Moon Shot?

Do you have a vision that propels the trajectory of your company, a destination that energizes investors and employees alike? What about an exciting outcome that delights your customers? I'm not talking about increasing your sales by 3 percent year-over-year, nudging overhead downward, or repaving the parking lot. That's business as usual.

Vision is all about painting a picture of an irresistible future. You'll be on the right track if your vision is big and challenging enough to scare you a bit. It should. If it doesn't, it's probably too small. Moon shots are about changing the world, or at least your sphere of influence within it. And I'm confident your sphere is far larger than you currently realize. The sheer audacity of an inspiring vision is like a bolt of electricity, a shock to the system, one that fires up and harnesses the team's momentum to seize the future.

So, are you a leader or a manager? If you're a leader—or if you want to become one—and if you yearn to be equipped to create and cast a vision for your organization, then read on. You're a tenth of the way through already.

A vision is not a guarantee. Plenty of visions fail. But having no vision is a guarantee of failure. It's only a matter of time before stagnation or strategic failures rob you of your future. I know because I've experienced it firsthand. It's a story I'll share next in Question 2.

Jumpstart Your Vision Script

The Vision Scripter is a simple, interactive system that makes crafting your Vision Script fast and easy.

Try it free at VisionDrivenLeader.com