

# VISION AND CHANGE

## A T R U S T W O R T H Y S A Y I N G

NO. 16

Rare are the people who embrace change. Most of us like things the way they are and if we don't like it – well, we'd rather live with the devil we know rather than the devil we don't know. The whole concept of vision assumes change. We cannot promote a vision of a better world without making changes.

Leaders change things. They ruffle feathers and create tension for those of us who are a little fearful of the unknown or kind of like things the way they are. How effectively a leader navigates the turbulent waters of change separates leaders from great leaders.

As much as some would like it, nothing stays the same. Suns set, babies arrive, bodies grow old, graduations launch new adventures, careers end, snow melts. Things change. Safety resides in how things are, and fear lurks in the unknown. The status quo holds power, wealth, comfort and security for some and vulnerability, poverty, pain and fear for others. Generally the "haves" resist change while the "have nots" are more open to a shift in the landscape.

When a leader's vision for a new future is too wimpy, it falls short of inspiring and motivating followers. When the envisioned future is too much like today, it does not create the excitement needed to motivate the troops. On the other hand, a picture of the future that redirects an organization far away from its current status can overwhelm and deflate the enthusiasm of the followers. When the rank-and-file followers lack hope, they become vulnerable to the seduction of opponents who, like the 10 spies at Kadesh Barnea (Numbers 10:11ff), see only the giants and not the better future.

So how does a leader sell change? Two general strategies are basic in change theory. First, a leader must paint a picture of hope. He or she must cast a vision of how much better life will be once the vision is accomplished. Hope is powerful. Hope inspires. Hope energizes. But hope fades, and a leader needs to cast the vision over and over. A leader's fundamental challenge is to keep hope alive.

It is no accident that one of the greatest speeches in American history is entitled, "I Have a Dream." In this great address, now more than 50 years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. used his exceptional oratory skills to paint a picture of how life could be. It inspired then and it still does today.

Second, a leader may need to describe the risk of continuing on the current, destructive trajectory and explain that disaster awaits if the proposed changes are not implemented.

American politicians have mastered this technique. Much more time, money, and wind are spent bashing opponents than defining the hope for the future. More often than not, politicians focus attention on how bad life will be if their opponent is elected rather than emphasizing how good life could be if they are in office. Some may say that it is easier to tear down than it is to build up, and that is true. But it is also true that fear is a deeper, more primal emotion and generally trumps hope – at least in the short-run.

A sage leader knows when to inspire followers with hope and when to motivate through fear. But a legitimate leader only uses legitimate fear, not imaginary traumas that play on the unsupported fear of the uninformed for the sake of manipulation. Great leaders see down the road farther than others. They anticipate real disasters and, like the prophets of old, blow the horn of warning.

Honorable leaders honor the past. We all build on foundations laid by others and visions of the future are not formed in a vacuum. Wise leaders do not bash the past to bolster their accomplishments. They know that others have driven the train before them and others will drive it after they are gone. New directions do not necessitate condemning the past; rather, they recognize that every launch requires a launching pad and they know that someday their work will be the foundation for the next new and exciting vision.

Recognize that change is uncomfortable for most people. Describe the envisioned future in vivid detail over and over to instill hope in the hearts of followers. Use legitimate fear to warn people away from impending danger that may wait beyond their limited horizons. And honor the past that provides the foundation upon which new dreams are launched.

*This lesson written by Dan Bolin is a part of a larger series on leadership called "A Trustworthy Saying." Find more teaching/lessons available for download for free at: [www.refuelinginfllight.com/trustworthysaying](http://www.refuelinginfllight.com/trustworthysaying)*