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WHEN AND HOW TO CREATE A VISION PEOPLE BELIEVE IN

Welcome to The Highly Valued Leader podcast where I make it simple for leaders at all levels to amplify their value. My name is Mel Savage and I went from working in the mailroom at a small ad agency to making multiple six figures in senior management at McDonald's, to running my own multiple six-figure executive coaching business. I've had huge successes in my career and epic failures. All of it taught me the world-class leadership, mind and skill sets that I simplify for my clients and share with you on this podcast. I'll help you reset your leadership style, demystify the politics, and help you become the highly valued leader everyone wants on their team. Get ready for the most honest, direct and revolutionary leadership coaching you've ever heard. Let's simplify leadership together.

Hi, leaders. Welcome back to the podcast. Today we're talking about creating a vision, how often you create a vision, when you should create a vision, what you use it for, and how to actually do it. I know sometimes when we talk about creating a vision, it can seem like a more advanced leadership skill. It sounds big, it sounds scary. But I want you to know, it's not. Even when you are an individual contributor, you create a vision to some degree without even knowing it. Now it's just more formally and intentionally deciding when we need to create a vision for our teams. And there's probably an opportunity for vision in more places than you actually think.

A vision is just a really simplified strategy. And for me, strategy is really a filter. It's a filter for what we do, what we think, how we focus, what we align to, what we want to achieve, what we say no to, and all the things. We all need a filter because there's so much coming at us. And a strategy is really a filter that aligns with something that has a purpose, that is intentional. And a vision is just another version of that. A vision is a strategy that provides guidance and clarity. That is all it is.

For today, what I really want to do is provide you with some different use cases for vision, and then how to create a vision for each of those use cases. That's what we're going to do today. I always like to start each of the podcasts a little bit with why. Why should I even worry about this? Why should I do this? When do I know that I need to do this? And in this case, when do I know that I need to create a vision?

Some of the signs that you might want to be looking for are if you think you're just working on everything; if you have no filter and you just say yes to everything; or if you basically have no basis for prioritization other than who is screaming the loudest, who has the loudest voice, or who's the squeakiest wheel; if you find yourself complaining that your team has no direction and no strategy, or the company has no direction or strategy, or you're not able to move things forward because you're waiting for direction from on high so you're just like, *'Well, we're just going to wait until the bosses tell us what the vision is going to be.'* That's when you can start to create something or miss one.

What I've certainly fallen victim to in my life is shiny object syndrome where I'm like, *'Oh, that's kind of interesting. Let's do that… Oh, I see a need here. Let's fill that gap... Oh, this is kind of an interesting project. I want to do this…'* That's also a time when a strategy or a filter could be necessary. When you butt heads with people who create

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barriers, that's really a sign that there is no vision and everyone is just trying to figure out how to get their own agenda executed against. They just kind of always rationalize why their idea or their focus or the things that they need are the most important things.

And you don't want to be butting heads or creating animosity or a lot of conflict. There's some healthy kind of conflict, meaning there's healthy discussion, there's healthy debate, and then there's like just butting heads with people who create barriers or you being a person who's creating a barrier. The last one I think that is a really good sign that you probably need to create a vision is if you're getting a really high turnover on your team. People are getting exhausted, burnt out, and leaving. They're not getting where they want to go, they're not growing, or they just don't feel like they're part of something. You need a vision to be able to do that. So if you're seeing a lot of high turnover on your team, not having a vision and not having a focus can be the problem.

When you create a vision, what's going to happen? The benefits of doing this are that you and your team are going to waste a lot less time, not only on actual work that you don't need to do, but on all the mindset drama that gets in the way of the complaining, or the dissatisfaction or the resentment that actually slows you down doing the work that you do need to do. All of that means ultimately, when you're wasting less time and stuck and less drama, you're going to have to work less. Isn't that going to be great? You're going to have to work less.

And now your problem is going to be how to feel like you are providing value to an organization when you're not working all the hours. But that's a discussion for another day. What we're trying to solve here is that you're working less. And when you work, you're working more productively on all the right things. And you can bring the temperature way down in your team. It's like no more *hustily, graspy* high-tension, everybody running from meeting to meeting. You can really bring with a vision the temperature way down.

I always say, and I'll say this, again. Your job as a leader is to create an environment for results to happen. And you are the thermostat for your team. If you're running on high, if you're you're running on chaos, if you don't have a filter to get your work done, nobody has a filter. It needs to start with you. You need to create the energy in the team and you can bring that temperature way, way down.

Having a vision also allows you to make strategic decisions. You can be less reactive. You can say, *'Yeah, that's a great idea. I love it. I really want to do it, but not now. It's not part of the vision. It's not part of our focus.'* You can be a lot less reactive. And you're going to butt heads with people less because you're going to be able to align on what we're trying to do. That's going to be the rationale for why you do things, not our individual agendas. Shiny object syndrome is not going to be there anymore. And even when you aren't getting direction from on high, like when the executive team isn't making a decision or they can't align on a strategy, you can still do your own. This is going to help you do that.

I have a client who works in an organization where they don't do a lot of strategic thinking, but she wants that. So I said to her, why don't we just create a stealth strategy? The organization doesn't have to know formally that there is a strategy. But your team and you can create focus on how you're filtering things and how you're doing your work. And you can just more organically communicate that out piece by piece if the organization is afraid to lock in on the strategy, which happens sometimes. You can still create your own to help your team. There are so many ways that you can create a strategy and vision to help your team get results faster in a more focused way.

So what are the use cases for creating vision? I bet you can guess some of them based on why I think it's important. But of course, the very first one, the one that we think about most times when we think about the word *'vision'* is **organizational direction**. When you are in the C suite, or when you're leading the organization, you

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want to be able to create a vision of where you want the organization to go. And it should be inspirational. It should be futuristic.

Back before many of you were born, probably, Microsoft had that famous vision of a computer on every desk, or Steve Jobs had a vision for music in your pocket. Music in your pocket wasn't an organizational vision, but it was a really strong vision for what they were trying to create in the organization. So those are the kinds of big things and big visions that you want to be thinking about that really change the world when you're looking at the organization. And that helps guide people, that helps guide your strategies overall on how you're going to do that. That is first and foremost how we think about vision in general.

But then there are lots of other places where vision can be useful. So I've talked about it over and over and over again. ***Workload***–a workload for how to filter it and establish strategic priorities for what you will and won't work on. ***Team culture*** is a really big one; a vision for how your team operates. I think this is a really big piece of how to build a high-performing team and how you and your team operate together. We'll talk about creating that. A team culture is a great place to create a vision. ***Departmental growth and scaling your growth***–whether or not the organization has, and if they do, that's even better; and if the organization has a vision, usually they've defined some strategic pillars on how that vision is going to be brought to life. And then your department's job is then create a vision for your department that aligns with those strategic pillars that bring that vision to life, identifying the gaps and filling those gaps for your department. I'm going to talk about that a bit as well. ***Change Management***–we want to create a vision for change management, meaning, why we need this change, what it's going to deliver, how it supports the organizational values, what it means, and how we'll do it. There can be a vision there as well.

Another place where vision can really be important is your own ***career***, and the career of your reports as well. But I think for your own career, so many people don't have a vision for what they want. They just say I want this as my next title, or I want to be CEO, or I want to be CTO, or whatever it is. They talk about that. But what does that look like? Where and what size organization? With what kind of people? What kind of leader are you? We can really bring that vision to life. If you think about it from an organizational standpoint, we have a vision and some strategic pillars. What are the vision and strategic pillars of your own career? That's really interesting and a fun thing to think about creating. And that's something that I work with my clients on as well.

Those are some use cases and I think the most important thing to remember when you're putting a vision together in any of those use cases is you can't do it alone. It's not your job as CEO to sit in a room by yourself, read some books, read the newspapers, see where the industry is going, and then come up with a vision on your own. You don't have to do this in a vacuum. The same thing for team culture or departmental growth or your own career or workload dissemination and vision, you don't need to do it alone in a vacuum.

Actually, what I'll say to you is that even if you are smart enough to do it alone in a vacuum, it won't be as effective if you are doing it alone in a vacuum. The first rule of creating a vision is don't do it alone or people will not buy into it. We need to collaborate with people. And this goes for every single use case. You collaborate on the problem. I know that seems weird because sometimes the problems seem obvious, but they're just obvious to you. You need to find out what people think. Do they even see a problem?

What I see so often is that people bring solutions, strategies, or visions to solve a problem that nobody actually sees. You need to not work alone on the problem either. So you're collaborating on the problem, you're collaborating on the goal, you're collaborating on the solution, and then you're collaborating on the implementation of the vision. But just creating the vision, just creating it in and of itself is collaborating. Your role

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is strategic lead and orchestrator. Your role is not coming up with all the great ideas. You're not the only creative brain on your team. And if you think you are, then you're going to have trouble not only creating a great vision but creating a vision that people align behind.

If you are creating organizational direction, I imagine that not only are you reading the tea leaves in the industry that you're in, but also in terms of socially where the industry is going, where the world is going, what the key issues facing everyone, where do you see the opportunity not just for your industry, but for people's lives in general. That's a really big way to look at it. And you can actually not only work with your leadership team but if you have consultants or marketing experts or branding people that can come in and help you feed a little bit of that, that can also be very, very useful to you as well.

You don't have to do all of that. You don't have to bring in outside resources. But I definitely think working cross-functionally with your leadership teams, talking about those things, and really identifying the gaps that are available and the vision for what people will need, those are the kinds of things that you want to be talking about and collaborating on the problem that needs to be fixed first, and then what the fix looks like. That's really what you want to collaborate on.

Then from there, you'll build your strategic vision and strategic pillars. Same thing with if you're talking about team culture, for instance. You want to sit with your team and talk about the problem. What are the problems? Where are the gaps that we want to actually fill? I find when we're brainstorming, talking about gaps first is easier for people than talking about what's working and what we'd like or what we'd like to do. Talk about gaps, talk about what's working, talk about the ideal scenario. Then you go away, you work on it, you bring it back, you get their feedback, they go away, you work on it, bring it back, get their feedback.

I always like to think of it like an accordion, where you're bringing information in, you're synthesizing that information, and you're pushing it back out, you're bringing information in, you're synthesizing, you're pushing it back out. That's what you're doing with your team as you're collaborating on the problem and a potential goal and the solution. Those are the kind of three parts of the vision. I would say too, not just about the problem, the goal, and the solution, but how you articulate the vision. It has to be simple and it has to be easy to understand.

I had a guy I used to work with at McDonald's, his name is Rocco Levanto. He's not there anymore; I'm not there anymore. But he was an operations guy out of Montreal. One time I was touring the market with him, and he told me that he always has three things that his team is focused on, and they review them every quarter. Sometimes some of those three things would continue into the next quarter, depending on what they are. But he and his team would always focus on the three things. That's how they ladder up to the overall goals of the company. Then he would take them back every quarter to talk about the three things–what are we keeping, what are we moving forward with, that kind of thing. And then the team would focus again.

I love that idea; it really stuck with me. I love the idea of having *'Here are the three things that were focused on.'* If you're using three things, for instance, to not only demonstrate, we're going to put the extra emphasis on people's focus, that's great. But if you're using it as a workload filter, for instance, you also need to get the alignment of your management and your stakeholders to say, *'Here's what we're focusing on this quarter, here's why, and here's how it aligns.'* You can definitely do that.

Once you collaborate with your team on the problem, the goal, and the solution, then you need to collaborate probably a little bit along the way with your stakeholders as well when it comes to workload and team culture for that matter, as well. The same thing to departmental growth, you're always collaborating with your team, with

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your leadership team, and with your stakeholders on how you and your department are going to focus on aligning to the overall goals of the organization.

Even if there is no overall goal in the organization, then you just create your departments based on where you see the opportunity in your department to address the bottom line, your key KPIs, and of course, any sort of financial targets that you have as well. I would say for each of the use cases if I haven't said it enough, collaborate on the problem, get alignment, synthesize it, push it back out, then come back. Collaborate on the goal. What's the objective that we're trying to hit here? What are we trying to achieve?

Get all the ideas, synthesize it, push it back out, get alignment, then here's the solution, here's the vision for how we're going to be doing this. Sometimes the vision is a word. Sometimes the vision is a sentence like, *we're going to put computers on every desk*. We create a vision like that. Sometimes the vision is *here are three things we're focusing on this quarter*. You get to decide what the vision looks like. A vision is just a tool to create focus, and it's your job to create focus.

When I work with my clients, because I'm a cognitive behavioral coach, there are two things that we always ground ourselves in before we do anything. Everything I've talked about today is actions that you can take in terms of collaboration and different parts of collaboration to create a vision and why you need it. The actions are great. You have an action plan, fantastic. But how you execute that action plan is so important. What the energy is behind it, what the thinking is behind it and what your emotional energy is behind the activation of it is actually going to determine whether that action plan is successful or not.

Because if you have this great action plan focused on collaborating with people, but the whole time, you are frustrated and impatient and you already kind of have the idea in your head of what you want people to do, think, and create for you and you're just going through the motions, obviously, this isn't going to work. Having a plan and knowing how to do something isn't necessarily the whole thing. It's about who you are, while you're doing it that really makes the difference.

In terms of emotional focus, for a project like this to be able to create a vision, what you want to do is really go in with zero agenda so your emotional focus is open, curious, and for me, creative. I like to think of being creative as an energy that is solutions-oriented, very flexible, and just inquisitive. I guess, curious as well. So open, curious, and creative. I think that's really how you want to be emotionally when you're going into a project like this. And patient because sometimes it takes a minute for people to get on board. If you're pushy and impatient or rigid, you will lose people.

Here's a couple more. I think compassionate and supportive are also very important because there are going to be people who are rigid, who don't like this idea, who are afraid of change, and who like things the way that they are. And if we get impatient with those people or frustrated with those people, we could lose them. And they're going to create some noise that you don't really need to have to deal with when you're going through this.

You can be compassionate because there have been times in your life when you didn't want to have to change or didn't want to have to do something or like things the way that they were. You can understand when people are like that. Maybe they have their own agenda, something that's really important to them, and so they're closed off from listening to you. Your job is to circle back with that person, be compassionate, be understanding, listen to why they have issues, and see if you can help them get on board based on what's important to them.

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That doesn't mean you don't have ideas, too. Of course, you have ideas too. You can be open and curious and creative and have thoughts. That's okay. At the end of the day, you're the one who's going to finalize the vision. But as you're talking to your team and as you're talking to your stakeholders, and you're listening, and you're being open and curious, and creative, that's where you're going to get their best thinking. And you can add their best thinking to your best thinking. You can even share your best thinking and get their reaction to it.

Sometimes, because you've been thinking about this for a long, long time, and you share your best thinking, people haven't been thinking about it as long as you and they can't quite get their heads wrapped around where you're at. So you have to slow things down and bring them along. Think about where you might have been at the beginning. Explain to them. *"Look, I was here…. And then I was thinking about this. And then I thought about this. And then I thought about this…. And here's why I think this is kind of where I'm directionally headed. What do you think about that?"*

You can't just throw them the solution without helping them get through how you got there. That's just a little sidebar heads-up. Just because you've been thinking about it nonstop for six months doesn't mean everyone else's. And it takes people a while to get where you are.

It's thinking that creates your emotions. If you want to be really focused on being open, curious, creative, and listening which is the action of other people, then what would you need to think to create the idea of openness, curiosity and creativity? Creativity could be *there's a solution to everything. I wonder how I can make that work.* Or curiosity is *I want to hear what people think. I wonder how they would make this work. I wonder what they think about this.*

Openness is the same. *There is no right answer here* is a great way. I always use that sentence in my head to say *there is no right answer here.* There are only the answers that we make right. My answer isn't right and no one else's is either. Let's just listen for understanding. These are all sentences that I use in my head that immediately dropped me into openness, curiosity and creativity.

For compassionates, *I've been where they are… They need help getting focused... They're not bad; they just can't see where we're going... I can help them see where we're going.* These are sentences that I use in my head. Yes, it would be really nice if they would get on board and just make my life easier. But if those are the sentences in your head, then you're going to have a hard time getting people on board. Because as I always say to my clients, it's not anyone's job to make your life easier; it's your job to make your life easier. And you can do that by really focusing the thinking, that's going to always bring the discussion back to *how can we, what is, what should we do, how can we do that;* not *why can't we?*

The *why can't we* part is good when you're brainstorming because it helps you kind of uncover all of the reasons or all the gaps that we need to fill. But why can't we? Is it going to really spark creativity when you're now looking for solutions going forward? You want to help people get out of that mindset. And you want to really have that second level listening, which is listening to what's not being said, being able to read the room, read the body language, getting curious.

I always say to my clients, when you see something, say something. When you see someone's face disinterested or in disagreement, let's say their energy is in disagreement, just say, *'Hey, I can see this isn't sitting well with you. Tell me what's going on in your mind.'* You really want to create a safe space to allow people to say what they're not saying. You can see it with their body language, their face if they've shut down, or whatever. And you can just sort of say, *'Hey.'* Bring them back in. Invite them back in, in a kind way. And then you're going to hear what people

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aren't saying. The reason people don't say things is because they don't feel safe to say them. And it's your job as the orchestrator, the facilitator, and the strategic lead to create safety for people to say things, and even with senior vice presidents sometimes.

You're sitting around the table, and the senior vice president doesn't want to say something. Depending on what kind of CEO you are, people might not want to challenge you. Or they might think they are challenging you if they disagree with you, or they have a different thought. So you really need to be open-minded on how you encourage discussion. You really need to create a safe space for people. And that's true, whether you're a CEO, or you're a manager, a senior manager of people, make sure that you're creating a safe space for people to offer you their suggestions.

In summary, a vision is something you can create at all different levels of your organization. In any situation that needs focus, you can create a vision. It can be anything from a big-picture organizational directional vision to how to create a team culture, to how to manage your workload, to how to manage your own career. You can create a vision for anything that needs to have a Northstar. That's what a vision is for.

One of the things that I work on with my clients for their leadership style is we create one-word visions. Mine is ease, by the way. So when I think about myself as a business owner and an executive coach, my vision is always about ease in everything I do. Not easy, but ease. Because a lot of my clients' thoughts about leadership are it's difficult, it's stressful, it's like a slog and I want them to be able to lead with ease. Ease for me is relaxed and simplified in the most direct way possible with a lot less stress. Think about ease that way.

The other thing too, as a business owner, there are lots of times where I can make things really complicated for myself, and I'm like, how do I do this with ease? Not just the easiest way, but what's the simplest way? What's the least stressful way to get this done? What's the most direct route to do this? I think about that. I am someone personally, and you may have experienced this on a podcast with me from time to time, I love to go down rabbit holes. I love to tell you every single thing I know. If I could have five-hour podcasts, I would. And so ease for me in that case, is I just need to make this as simple and as understandable and doable for my clients as possible.

With vision, it's any situation that requires focus. There's no right way to frame a vision. You do it with everyone around you; you don't have to do it yourself. You collaborate on the problem, you collaborate on the objective, and then you collaborate on the solution. Your job is just to bring in all the ideas, synthesize them, and push them back out. Bring in all the ideas, synthesize them, and push them back out at every stage of creating the vision. That's how you do it with ease, my friend.

It can take time, but it doesn't have to be hard. It doesn't have to be stressful. It doesn't have to be like this heavyweight. And a lot of that comes from the emotion. Because when you're thinking thoughts that create openness, curiosity, and creativity, you can do this with ease. It's a very relaxed, peaceful way of creating a vision. And it's fun too. I think fun is a big part of ease for me as well. You see, for me, the vision is one word. For other people, it's a whole sentence. You get to make it what you want it to be.

Okay, my friends. That is what I have for you this week. Have a great one. I'll talk to you soon. Bye for now.

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