



Opinion

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Conversations and Touchstones for Healthcare Leaders: Communicating Your Vision

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Introduction

An essential component of today's fundamental strategic objective for organizations is business growth. Evidence from previous studies in management and psychology shows that leadership leads to growth and sustainability. One illustrative example may be found in transformational leadership where the focus is on the importance of the inspirational aspect of leadership and its axis for driving changes in organizations. For leaders to implement a successful new strategy, they must imagine what the organization will look and act like after achieving its strategic goal [1]. Once you have your vision, communicate it and let people know [2] There must be a consistent picture what success will look like - vision [1]. Vision should not be confused with mission or strategy, it should provide a clear image of the future [1]. While a mission statement explains organization's objectives and goals are steps to accomplish an objective, a vision describes a future state the organization will become [3] Effectively communicating a vision that clearly captures the organization's direction and defines its destination of the organization is essential for the leader [3]. Leaders should communicate a vivid, detailed and inspired description of what will happen when changes are implemented [1]. The leader must start with the consistent mental picture then communicate the vision [1].

Communication touchpoints for leaders should address the following issues. Which stakeholder groups and people do you need to touch regularly (and how often)? What types of communications are needed in each touch? In what order should different touches be held? Where and when to hold them? Touchpoint Leadership is a way of helping leaders navigate by focusing on relationships and connections as the primary unit of energy and value in their business [4]. Leaders enable themselves and others to build constructive relationships through the many points of connection - the

touchpoints [4]. The first concept of touchpoint leadership is priming the touchpoint to become relational [4]. The leader must see the world as a series of connecting threads and relationships, putting the emphasis on their capacity to connect [4]. Aside from a leader's confidence being critical to inspire and engage, the focus should also be on vulnerability [4]. Vulnerability is both courageous and safe, and also provides significant insights [4].

Second, connective energy at the touchpoint must be ignited with mutual growth [4]. Leaders should affirm the positive qualities of differences that reinforces differences and value friction, catalyzing new insights and connections[4]. Leaders should be ready to learn, adapt and flex from each relationship [4] and third, a collaborative enterprise must be built though co-creating learning systems and building trust [4]. This involves building and facilitating connections across an organization, catalyzing habits of learning that enable an organization to adapt and create a climate of mutual trust [4].

Leadership is explicitly connected with the future; leaders are able to gaze across the horizon and envision the future [5]. Storytelling is a performance art, half is knowing the right story and the other half is telling the story right [5]. Narrative is more than a simple reflection of events, is a construction used to transform an organization [6]. The seeing of events as a narrative involves activity by the storyteller [6]. Narratives are not only a device for telling information, they are devices for interpreting experience and informing action [6]. In leadership storytelling, the story's form and content, storyteller, and audience are all inseparable and intertwined[5].The future is uncertain and predictability will always be suspect, thus telling a compelling story about the future is difficult [5].The first step in augmenting the credibility of a future story is to



reduce the length of the causal chain between today's situation and the future [5]. Another step is telling a springboard story; depicting the future if an idea or change is implemented [5]. The listeners invent the future for themselves, sidestepping the problem of telling a compelling future story [5]. Another step is to keep things simple [5]. The human capacity to absorb multiple elements isn't unlimited, therefore the story should neither be too detailed or general [5]. Next, the storyteller should work backward from an image of the future [5]. Following this, the storyteller should link the future story to the listeners' current mind-set [5].

Effective leaders can inspire just by listening, making shareholders or customers feel their best. Communication begins with listening, not speaking [7]. Leaders must be listeners, as listening is vital to leadership. While earlier models of communication suggested that information senders (created and delivered messages) and receivers (processed information) played different roles, newer theory suggests that speaking and listening are integrated [7]. Listening to stakeholders is recognized as a strategy for optimum performance in every aspect of business [8]. Hearing is the first component of listening, affected by the level and characteristic of sound [7]. Leaders should focus on their speaking rate and time necessary to process information [7]. In the setting of technology, leaders are frequently communicating with individuals from other parts of the world [7]. Understanding how to listen effectively with participants with different perspectives is key for success [7].

Technology is pervasive and used for both for internal (e.g., employees, board members and leadership teams) and external (e.g., customers, donors and stakeholders) engagement [9]. Much effort is made to bolster internal communication with technology to help employees understand and support the organization's goal. But leaders must be thoughtful about the technology they implement. Digital tools do one of three things in the context of communication: facilitate the entire communication process (Zoom or Microsoft Teams), facilitate part of the process (email, text) or facilitate individual communication (reminders) [9]. One novel idea by Kim is to create an executive brand, something that elevates a leader's influence by expanding the impact of their leadership [9]. Specifically, platforms and spaces to provide meaningful insight, thought-leadership, and authentic perspectives on relevant issues [9]. There are four steps to creating a digital technology strategy. First, determine credibility focus - which dimension(s) should be elevated through digital communication [9]. Second, which platforms will be used [9]. Third, learn the formal and informal rules of social media platforms [9]. Every social media has their unique cultures and the leader must understand how to effectively engage them [9] and fourth, make a calendar to ensure consistent and focused messages are delivered [9].

Culture is the engine of value creation [10]. A culture that is well-aligned can create a powerful competitive advantage and serve as a medium through which any leadership initiative will be executed [10].

The central notion of corporate culture is that culture relates to core organizational values; a company's personality [11]. The

culture is manifested everywhere in the organization, and cultural messages must be clear and explicit [11]. Organizational culture functions as container of possibilities as the core values of the organization manifest in a diverse spectrum of possible strategies and structures [10]. Leadership communication is an indispensable tool of culture management and used to reinforce corporate values [11]. The goal of the leader is to help people understand and embrace the desired culture [11]. According to Pink, there are three elements important in motivating performance and shaping the enterprise's culture [12]. The first is autonomy, different that independence, which means acting with choice [12]. The second is mastery - the desire to get better and better at something that matters [12]. Mastery is a mindset, painful to achieve, and ultimately an asymptote [12]. And the third is purpose [12].

Content is not king. The language of leadership is influenced by language, the words that leaders communicate, and personality, how the message is delivered [12]. Influential communication involves the skillful expression of ideas and motivation [12]. In leadership communication, information only becomes inspiring when connected to purpose (a goal or vision statement) [13]. There are two essential forces for effective executive communication: purpose (the compelling reason an idea has value) and power (the leader's strength of commitment) [13].

Values are defined as beliefs that guide behavior. An organization's values and norms must support the actions consistent with its vision. Organizational values embody those values that guide organizational members in their selection or evaluation of behavior [14]. They underline in a company's identity, culture and socialization. Moreover, organizational values have been shown to influence strategic issues, strategic choice and decision making. There are several steps for a leader to create an ethical culture. Trust, at its core, is an assurance that lets people manage risk in their relationships with others [15]. Leaders gain control of a powerful tool for moving their initiatives forward, enhancing their collaborative efforts, and improving execution across organizations when they take charge of how to deal with trust [15]. There are three dimensions of trust: ability, integrity and loyalty [15]. Ability speaks to a leader being able, capable or skilled at accomplishing a specific task [15]. Integrity refers to the alignment between shared values (principles, fairness and character) and expectations (reliability and consistency) [15]. Loyalty is related to truth-telling [15]. When leadership demonstrates a commitment to ethics through its own behavior, the message resonates with employees [16]. Moreover, the leader must articulate the vision and values of the company in an explicit statement of values and beliefs [16].

It is worthwhile to take a moment to consider communicating a vision in an organizational crisis. An organizational crisis is operationally defined as an event involving high levels of uncertainty and time urgency. An organizational crisis can threaten the interplay of an organization's goals and its relationships. Unfortunately, crises are inevitable. On the surface, crises are handled by teams and the preference for spokesperson is typically the company leader. However, essential crisis communication is essential for repairing

damaged reputation. Taken more figuratively, when faced with a crisis, an organization releases a written statement and then complements that statement with an oral presentation [17]. Different stages of crisis require different types of information communication [18]. There are three categories of information: instructing, adjusting and internalizing [18,19]. According to Coombs, instructing information tells stakeholders who the crises will or might affect them, and what to do to protect them financially [19]. Moreover, Coombs suggests that organizations should match the appropriate crisis communication strategy to the specific situation [19]. The leader describes the agenda topics in the introduction, discusses the topics in the body of the statement and finishes with recapitulation in the conclusion [17]. It is important the leader does not shade the truth. While each part of the speech is crucial, the conclusion provides a sense of closure for the stakeholders [17]. The spokesperson should then prepare for a question and answer session.

The phenomenon of credibility is as ubiquitous in business as in everyday life. As credibility and skepticism are two poles on a continuum, when deciding to trust others, credibility matters. It is therefore not surprising that credibility is invariably the foundation of leadership and strategic communication. This is why stakeholders and customers view leaders as either believed and real or not. Because the decision to trust is usually under ambiguity, leaders must earn the confidence of their constituents. The leader must make themselves vulnerable to bolster the trustworthiness of another. Taken together, a leader's values must be deep rooted and have pervasive standards that influence moral judgments, responses to others, and commitments organizational goals [20]. Apart from the aforementioned credibility qualities, importantly leaders must communicate these in a consistent manner. To greatly simplify, credibility is earned. According to Shelton, credibility can be built and maintained with six actions [20]. First, leaders should clarify their values. Second, leaders should identify what their constituents want [20]. This shows them how their interests are aligned with the leaders [20]. Third, build a consensus to show how everyone's individual values and interests will be served by a collective set of common values [20]. Fourth, the shares valued should be communicated with conviction and be memorable [20]. Fifth, leaders must stand up to their beliefs [20]. And finally, leadership is not a spectator sport, leaders should lead by example [20]. Ultimately, credibility is gained in small quantities through physical presence [21]. Leaders have to be physically present to be trusted [21,22].

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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