1. Topic

Globally, nations and businesses are being driven by economies of discovery. The present era of instability means that managers and leaders have become masters of reinvention. Leaders define the future and chart a path forward. This requires that you be intellectually agile, that you leverage deep knowledge across networks, building on diverse ideas and perspectives, so that you can act upon an inspiring vision.

Starting with a compelling vision for the future allows you and your organization to engage in the creation of new value for your organization and for society and the economy. In short, the vision that you create expresses your dream for the organization and what you wish it to be in the future. It answers the question of “why” your organization exists. It has been said that whoever controls the dream, controls the future.

The shared vision should unify people and enable them to commit to a process for achieving ambitious outcomes. It should satisfy the question: “For the sake of what are we doing our work?” Google’s vision, for example, is “to organize the world’s information and to make it universally accessible and useful.” The vision is generally timeless in nature and represents the art of the long-term view. Michael Hyatt notes: “If you don’t have a clear vision, no strategy will save you.”

Once the vision for the organization has been developed, the strategy that you design to implement the vision enables you to answer the question of “Where are we heading?” Your strategy employs a number of tactics and actions (When, How) to ensure that you can reach the destination provided by your vision. While strategies are frequently fine-tuned to respond to client feedback and changing economic or social forces, it is important not to fall into the trap of creating a new strategy every month.

Defining the future state for your organization enables you to declare the organization’s values, in an aspirational way, motivating individuals and guiding their actions. Your strategy should distinguish clearly between urgent and important activities. Your strategic objectives, committing to how you implement your vision over 3-5 years, should be ‘SMART,’ meaning: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely. Accountability must be introduced into the discrete strategy elements. The old adage, “if it’s to be, it’s up to me” is as valid today as it ever was. Assigning accountability for each activity or deliverable is crucial to your success. As a leader, you help others to translate strategies into specific outcomes.

Ultimately, a vision without a strategy is just a dream. But, a vision paired with a concrete strategy, and measurable outcomes, can alter your operating universe.
2. Assignment

As you envision the future of the organization, and give life to your vision, values and strategy, ask the following questions:

a) Are you leading with vision? Creating a sense of common purpose and direction in the organization? Does the shared vision guide your work?

b) What emerging issues have you identified in the internal and external operating environments that affect organizational priorities?

c) Have you set clear expectations and identified who is accountable for performance outcomes?

d) Are you looking around corners to see what is coming in your direction?

e) Do you take the time to identify what is important for the future, as opposed to what is urgent and preoccupies you daily?

f) Is the vision you are creating with team members, colleagues and clients both hopeful and future-oriented?

g) Have you communicated the vision and priorities with clarity and conviction?

h) Are you using the vision as a leadership compass for your actions and words?

i) Are you taking intelligent risks to realize your vision and new futures?

j) How are you staying ahead of new developments? What networks are you tapping into?

k) What resources have you accessed or organized to stay ahead of the wave of change?

As you reflect upon these questions, it is worth underlining the fact that many of the industries, policies, services and job positions that existed even ten years ago have disappeared and have been replaced by new jobs, sectors and networks. The business in which you are engaged today is not necessarily the business line that will employ you in a decade. Taxi drivers are seeing the emergence of driverless cars on the horizon. Switchboard operators, the milkman, and elevator operators have long since seen disruptive technologies replace them. Meanwhile, jobs that did not exist ten years ago now include bloggers, social media analysts, cloud service specialists, nanotechnology engineers, robotics experts, 3D printing technicians, and many others. Bricks and mortar banks and financial institutions are seeing online banking displace much of their customary business. Being a creative disruptor is your responsibility as a leader. You cannot invent the future without understanding clearly the destination you wish to reach and how you plan to reach this ‘shore.’

3. Video Descriptions and Instructions

You are being asked to view two videos before reflecting upon a number of additional questions.

The first video features a futurist, Edie Weiner. As the keynote speaker for the Board Leadership Conference, October 3, 2011, she proposes that the global economy is undergoing a fundamental transformation, as opposed to a recession. You are asked to view the first 29 minutes of the video which is 44 minutes long. Weiner argues that this new economy is layered on top of aspects of previous economies: the agricultural, industrial, post-industrial,
information and meta-space eras. By studying trends over the last few decades, Weiner forecasts major trends now shaping the future. Sign posts to the future include the creation of new sectors and jobs, as disposable income and choices made by citizens and consumers shift the economy rapidly. The video can be found by accessing this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7X1zpUjvnpw

The second video is by Ian Godin, who is an Oxford-based economist, and it is entitled: Navigating our global future. Godin points out major trends shaping the entire world that require leaders to behave in different ways as they attempt to be strategic and to create successful business models for their respective organizations. The video is almost 7 minutes long and examines the velocity of new technologies, the implications of trends such as urbanization, systemic risks emerging across complex systems, and, new forms of governance. The video can be found at the following link: http://www.ted.com/talks/ian_goldin_navigating_our_global_future?language=en

4. Follow-Up Activities and Application

After viewing these videos, you are being asked:


b) Are you reading autobiographies of leaders?

c) What thought-leaders or blogs are you following in social media networks or on the Internet? Whether it is Edie Weiner, Richard Branson, Elon Musk, Ray Kurzweil, Nicholas Negroponte, or others?

d) Do you have an early warning system for ‘hot issues’ that involves members of your staff serving as your ‘eyes and ears’ or ‘advance team’?

e) Have you obtained the forward agenda for key meetings over the next year involving the participation of your President, CEO, Deputy Minister (DM), Vice President, Assistant Deputy Minister, Director General, Director, Board of Directors? Are you providing strategic advice to inform these events?

f) Do you connect with your Corporate Secretary, President’s office or DM’s office, or your Ministerial and Executive Services group to discuss key priorities of the organization?

g) Have you reviewed documents that are in the public domain, such as speeches, blogs, publications of leaders, so that you understand the views of key influencers?

h) Do you know what new external associations and groups are forming and coalescing around emerging issues affecting your organization? This often signals a shift in direction.

i) Do you know the interests, educational backgrounds and views of those leading your organization? Most leaders leave a public ‘footprint’ so it is wise to do your research.

j) Have you read the Master’s thesis or PhD dissertation written by your boss or by your Cabinet Minister? If not, you should do so. Insights on their current views are often found in these documents.

k) If your President, CEO, or DM, serve on external committees that deal with issues well beyond your organization, do you know what committees they serve on or which professional or
international bodies they serve on? If you are in the federal government, you can go to the Privy Council Office website and find out which DM Committees your Deputy Minister serves on. http://www.pco.gc.ca/index.asp?lang=eng&page=secretariats&sub=spsp-psps&doc=comm/mandat-eng.htm

l) Preparing briefing notes in support of committee work or in support of presentations to be made by your President or DM can enable you to engage in designing the future.
m) Do you know what Cabinet Committees your Minister serves on? Or which corporate boards of directors your President serves on? If so, think about how you can contribute to this work.
n) Do you follow the work of other levels of government, including that of bodies like the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and Big City Mayors? http://www.fcm.ca/home.htm

Taking proactive measures like those enumerated above enable you to scan the horizon to see where you can contribute added value to your organization. By providing strategic insights, and helping to inform the evolving vision of your organization and broader networks, your overall value as a leader increases.

5. Expert Knowledge

Dawn Nicholson-O’Brien is the President and CEO of Celtic Oracle, an executive services consulting firm. A former executive in the Government of Canada, Dawn served in executive level roles during three and a half decades. She also served as the Vice President of the Institute on Governance, has developed and delivered advanced leadership programs for executives, and, she is the recipient of numerous leadership awards. Dawn is a sought after speaker and author (see www.celticoracle.ca)

6. Key Words

Key words include: looking around corners; economies of discovery; masters of reinvention; designing the future; creating a compelling vision for the future; being a creative disruptor; thought-leaders; key influencers; forward agenda; strategic advice; scan the horizon; emerging issues and trends; think tanks; futurists; leadership compass; staying ahead of the wave of change.

7. Additional Resources and Reading

Curated Video Titles

- Future Think, www.Futurethink.com

Submitted by: Dawn Nicholson-O’Brien
President and CEO, Celtic Oracle
613-592-7708
dnicholsonobrien@rogers.com