

Leadership In Aid



Communicating Your Vision : the Elevator Approach

A key leadership role (no matter where you work) is to create ongoing commitment for the organization's vision of future success. Virtually all dynamic, energetic leaders have a passion about something and talk about it all the time – to anyone who will listen!

There's a good reason for that. If leaders stop talking about the vision it becomes a lot harder to see. A whole lot harder to enthuse everyone else about.

A great way to communicate a vision is to use a story. Why ? Well, ever since early man sat around a campfire, stories have been the basis of creating common values and truths, passing on history, sharing ideas. Telling stories creates trust and captures the hearts and minds of the audience. Moreover, stories establish a common ground between the teller (the leader with the vision) and the audience (other leaders, managers, employees, stakeholders, customers and so on).

There's only one downside to this. In our fast-paced world we seldom have time to settle around the campfire! But that doesn't mean they shouldn't stop trying – and that's where the so-called "elevator speech" comes in.

Creating the story: Make a story about your personal vision - what excites you about the things you do every day. Use that enthusiasm – it's very effective in getting the message across in all sorts of situations to all types of people.

No, (in case you are reading this in some remote part of the globe) you don't have to be in an elevator to make this work ! The "elevator speech" is a concise and convincing statement that communicates your vision in the amount of time you would have during a typical elevator ride (the reason why it's sometimes also called "the sixty-second sell"). It forces you to convey that key message, that vision of yours in just a few sentences. And this "elevator" moment can happen anywhere, anytime to anyone. Remember, your "elevator speech" - that 60 seconds - should sound natural and carry a sense of excitement and urgency.

Everyone of us has tens, possibly hundreds of opportunities each day to meet, greet and talk about what drives us and the business. A few minutes over a coffee in the hallway or at lunch, a quick, unplanned drop in on a staff meeting : each of these offers a small window of opportunity to "sell" your message.

Leaders who want to get their vision across should prepare for (and can create) these "informal" opportunities. Remember, the message may be short, but the impact over time can be dramatic. In this case, repetition makes perfect!

This how-to-guide is specifically designed as part of an ongoing series of "How To" guides for People in Aid by the Center for Creative Leadership (www.CCL.org/europe) for leaders at all levels in humanitarian and development organizations.