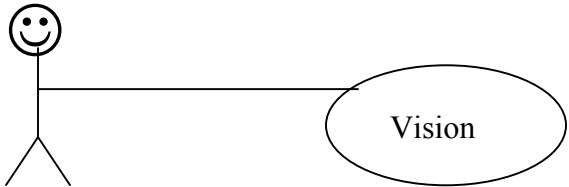


MOVING FROM VISION TO ACTION
Philippians 1:27
World Mission Multi-Regional Conference
Madrid, Spain
Closing Plenary Session
E. LeBron Fairbanks
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INTRODUCTION

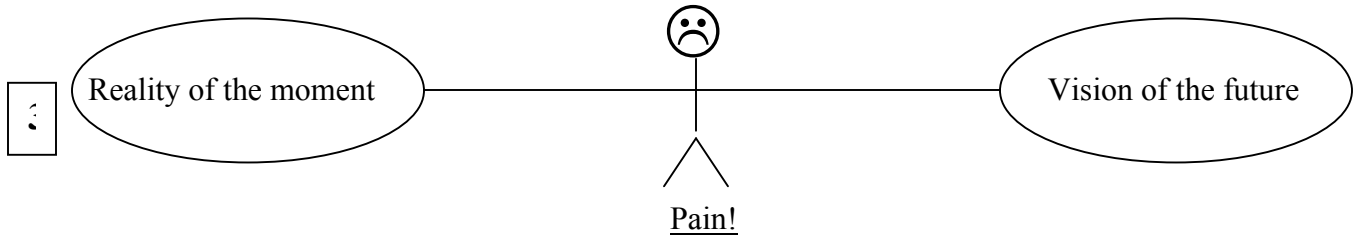
1. In mentoring and teaching emerging leaders we often focus on the joy of leadership and not the pain in leadership. It is true that individuals in leadership positions have the potential to influence change and impact people. This is rewarding and we are energized. A vision captures us. Growth and expansion will result. Surely it is right. Everyone will agree! We will move ahead. The world is changed. And we are grateful!

2. We don't talk as much about the pain in leadership. This pain can be illustrated by me standing with outstretched arms. In one hand, I hold tenaciously to the vision I believe God has given me for my assignment and responsibility. I believe it is the right action to take, policy to adopt, direction to pursue or goal to adopt.

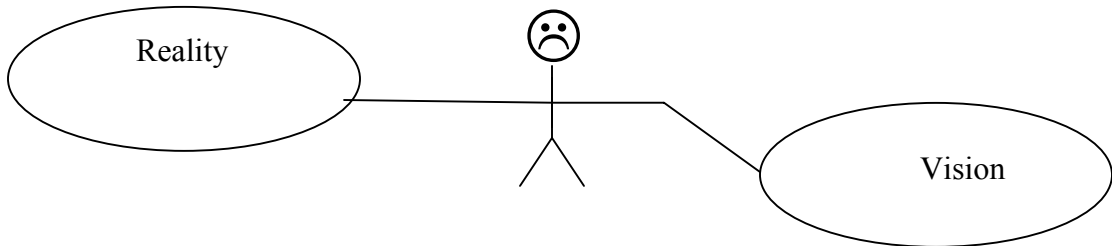


3. However, from the other extended arm is a hand firmly holding to "reality" – the situation or context in which I work, the circumstances (finances/facilities) which seem to dictate what can and cannot be done, or the people or followers who must embrace the vision if what is dreamed is to move from vision to action. And we are stunned when those with whom we work reject the vision that is cast or challenge the vision as it is presented.

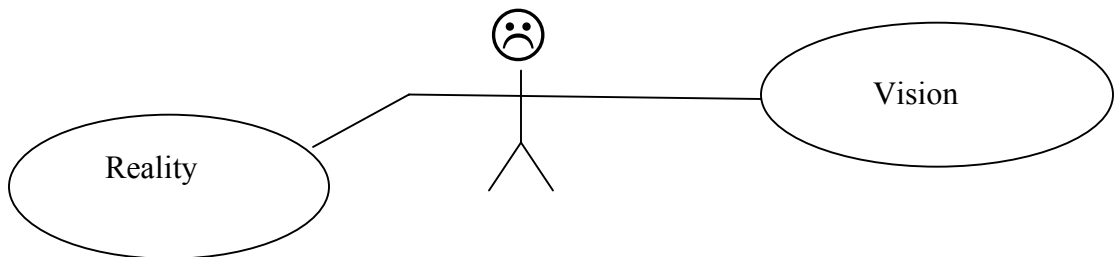
The tension in holding on to our vision and to the reality of the present situation often produces pain.



4 If we relax one arm and let go of the vision, we drift along with no direction.



4 If we hold to the vision and let go of the people we are known as leaders without followers...and nothing happens



It is in holding, intentionally, to both vision and reality that the possibility exists for leaders to move from vision to action and with this intentionality comes both joy and pain for the leader.

4. Why? Sooner rather than later, Christian leaders are jolted when we experience this reality:

- good and godly people often differ on how to reach mutually desired goals; and sometimes,
- these good and godly people COLLIDE ... and a faith community is divided, the kingdom of God suffers and satan laughs.
- this is the pain in leadership. Intense pain!

5. I have come to see that these collisions occur, not necessarily because of good or bad ideas, noble or sinful goals, or right or wrong solutions. Rather, good and godly people most often collide over VISION and VALUES in the faith community. And we are caught in the middle of a divided group of Christians over where we should be going (vision) and how we are going to get there (values).

6. And in the midst of these painful situations we ask ourselves, as leaders, these probing questions:

- Is it possible, in these situations, to live and work together as Christians so that our relationships are redemptive and a witness to unbelievers of the reconciling work of God in Christ?
- If “in Christ, all things are made new,” then how does our relationship with Christ inform and guide us in the way we lead in these painful encounters?
- In the midst of these conflicting situations and irreconcilable expectations placed on us, what does it mean, really mean, to lead a divided faith community with the mind of Christ?

These questions frame my remarks to you about leading others and moving a faith community from vision to action. I have pursued these questions since 1978 when I moved to a cross-cultural teaching assignment at the European Nazarene College near Schaffhausen, Switzerland. Later, I probed these questions during my tenure in Manila at the Asia Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary for the past seventeen years at Mount Vernon Nazarene University.

7. It has been through wrestling with these questions that I have learned about the leadership qualities needed to guide a faith community. And I continue to learn about the movement from a vision of the leader to action by the entire faith community, particularly in times of conflict and collision.

8. In light of these realities, I want to share with you six “anchors” to hold us steady as faithful Christian leaders as we grasp firmly to our vision and, at the same time, seek to move the church, university, region or denomination to action.

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Anchor # 1: “Speak Gracefully”

Issue: “Watch the words.”

Principle: Words we speak can bless or “destroy” people.

- “What comes out of my mouth reflects what is in my heart” so Jesus states in the Gospels.
- As leaders we either:
 - Encourage or discourage those with whom we work.

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- Uplift or put them down.
 - Speak positively or negatively about them.
 - Reflect cultural sensitivity or cultural “blindness” to them.
 - Focus on the other person, or focus on self.
- I often ask myself: how do others feel when they leave my presence?
 - Stronger or weaker?
 - Larger or smaller about themselves?

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- Confident or “scared”?
 - Understood or misunderstood?
 - Affirmed or manipulated?
 - Blessed or “destroyed”?

Henri Nouwen once stated:

- *“When the door of the steam bath is continually left open, the heat inside rapidly escapes through it.”* (he is referring to the problem with individuals who talk constantly.)
- “The praise to criticism ratio with others with whom we work should be at about 80-90% praise or positive statements to 10-20% criticism or negative statements.” Good advice from Sven Walroos, Scandinavian clinical psychologist.
- According to Ephesians 4:25, God uses the words we speak to others within the Body of Christ to extend His grace through us to them! What a powerful and probing thought!
- Remember, the words we speak to those with whom we work especially those who differ and even collide with us, can bless them or destroy them. Choose to bless them!

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16 Anchor #1: “Speak Gracefully”

17 Anchor # 2: “Live Gratefully”

Issue: Comparison is the root of inferiority.

Principle: “Don’t whine -- be grateful.”

- Comparison is so pervasive in our society – in the workforce, the family, the local church or region, in our communities and particularly within ourselves.

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- We can feel good about ourselves – our gifts, talents and abilities – until we compare ourselves with the gifts, talents and abilities of other people.
- We can believe our co-workers are adequate for the jobs we give to them until we compare their work – creativity, innovation, energy, collegiality – with others.
- Comparison can eat us alive ... And rob us of joy, relationships, confidence and peace, and in the process, sap our energy and drain us of enthusiasm.
- Comparison can transform us from being a delightful “boss,” supervisor, or pastor into a preoccupied, dejected, negative and disgruntled individual that other people only endure.

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- What is the antidote to comparison? Three profound biblical qualities:
 - *Gratitude!*
 - *Thankfulness!*
 - *Appreciation!*
- We can choose to accept the people and provisions God in His wisdom has given to us.
- We can choose to work to bring out the best in others through seeing the best in them.
- In every situation, we can choose to be grateful, believing that God is in the midst of all that we are doing (I. Thessalonians 5:18).
- Gratitude is the “life-giving” antidote to the negative impact of comparison.
- Remember: Don’t whine over what you don’t have; be grateful – in all things – for what God has provided. Cultivate an attitude of gratitude.

Anchor #1 & 2: “Speak Gracefully”

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“Live Gratefully”

21

Anchor # 3:

“Listen Intently”

Issue:

“Seek first to understand.”

Principle:

Understanding, not agreement, is the key to conflict management.

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- Believe that “good and godly” people can have honest and intense differences.
- I can tell you, after 25 years in higher education administration that *good and godly people sometimes collide over vision and values*. And you have similar testimonies!

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- This is why I have come to see that theological vision (what I believe about people / what I “see” in them) precedes organizational vision. (What I want for the church, university, region or denomination.) God give me your eyes to really “see” the people with whom I work.

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- In conflict situations with good and godly people, I have learned to ask two growth producing questions:
 - “What can I learn? How can I change?”
- Likewise, I have learned at least two growth inhibiting questions:
 - “Why me? What if...?”

As a leader I may be a good administrator, however, I must be a great listener. I can listen for understanding. And listen for what is said. Also, I need to listen for what is not said. Listening to the people with whom I work values them. They deserve to be heard. They may have spiritual gifts needed to move the vision to action.

Remember, understanding not agreement, is the key to conflict management.

Anchor #1, 2, 3:

“Speak Gracefully”

25

“Live Gratefully”

“Listen Intently”

26

Anchor # 4:

“Forgive Freely”

Issue:

“Be proactive in extending forgiveness.”

Principle:

A spirit of forgiveness transforms and empowers leaders.

27

- One of my profound life lessons is this: forgiveness has little to do with the external environment around me, and everything to do with my “internal” condition!
- **Remember this:** extending forgiveness does not wait for the “other” to request forgiveness.
 - Example: Jesus on the cross: “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”
 - Was Jesus naïve? Did he really believe that those who were killing him did not know what they were doing? No!
 - Did Jesus believe that by extending forgiveness, those who were slandering him and hurting him would cease their activity? No!
 - Jesus was not going to permit what others said against him or the evil they did against him to create a bitterness or resentment within him and thereby create a rupture on the relationship with God His Father. It simply was not worth it!
 - “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do!”
- Extending forgiveness frees me from bondage to the other person.
- Too often, we permit persons who have offended us to control us.
- “Great leaders,” “we are told,” are shaped in the most challenging and difficult times.”
- Remember, a spirit of forgiveness transforms and empowers leaders.

Remember the first four Anchors :

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“Speak Gracefully”

“Live Gratefully”

“Listen Intently”

“Forgive Freely”

29

Anchor # 5:

“Lead Decisively”

Issue:

“Be decisive - avoid paralysis.”

Principle:

We seldom “enjoy” the luxury of having all the information we need before making necessary decisions.

Perhaps you have heard it said that “one person’s dream is another person’s nightmare!” Yet, it is in this context that we live, work and lead.

- It is in the tension between our vision for the future and the reality of the present that our decision making as leaders most often takes place.
- As leaders we constantly move between two needs: the need for long range and strategic planning for our assignments and the daily routine of budgets, personnel, facility management and interpersonal conflicts.
- Sometimes this balancing act is between macro-managing (strategy focused on the big picture) and micro-managing (staying focused on the small implementation details of our assignments).
- I have often told the people with whom I work that I want to be a leader of faith and vision. But I don't want to cross the line to be an irresponsible leader. Yet who determines where the "line" really is between faith and irresponsibility.
- I don't want to think I have to choose between biblical commands (i.e., "go ye...and make disciples") and people needs (i.e., salary increases, equipment needs, and travel expenses). But sometimes I do, and must.
- By now, you have heard me speak of the critical importance of RESPECT for our brothers and sisters with whom we labor as we pursue the biblical mandate to "Go...and make disciples..."
- You have heard me discuss "respect" for our co-workers through:
 - the words we speak,
 - expressing gratitude for them,
 - listening to them intently, and
 - forgiving freely.
- In fact, respecting our brothers and sisters in Christ, especially those with whom we differ – even collide with us – is at the heart of what it means to Lead with the Mind of Christ.
- However, at some point in our leadership roles, decisions have to be made. As I say this, we must remember that the real issue is not, "must a decision be made." Rather the question is how, within the community, are the decisions made and implemented.
- Especially in times of conflict over vision, decisions will need to be made – even when continuing differences exist! And, in these times, we will lead – lead decisively – but from our knees and often with a weeping heart!

- We must avoid paralysis – waiting until everyone agrees with us – when decisions need and must be made.
- We seldom “enjoy” the luxury of having all the information we need, before making necessary decisions. Sometimes, perhaps often, we must move ahead without everyone within the community agreeing with the vision or direction to be taken.

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- How do we move ahead, decisively, in these painful situations while, at the same time, show Christian respect to those who differ with us?
 - We move ahead -- decisively – through
 - Prayer, with them, for them and for “me” as leader;
 - Collaboration, involving them when and where we can in the process.
 - Gratitude, thanking God, and “them” for their gifts, talents, abilities and testimony of faith in Jesus as Lord;

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- In this spirit of humility and brokenness, we move ahead:
 - Confidently – believing that God is working in the needs of this difficult situation, and,
 - Decisively, not with paralysis or uncertainty, but with the conviction that God has spoken his word of vision and direction, and that He will continue to lead His people to action even though the circumstances or attitudes may give evidence of His work at the present time.
- This is leading with the mind of Christ – leading decisively in the midst of complex and difficult situations.

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- To lead decisively with Christian humility demands that we continue to nurture and develop:
 - Listening and communicating skills,
 - Timing and processing skills,
 - Affirming and encouraging skills,
 - Asking and Inquiring skills and
 - “Gift” discernment and delegation skills.

The more I know about Christian leadership, the more I realize there is to know. I am a committed lifelong learner and student of what it means to lead decisively with the mind of Christ.

- Remember, avoid paralysis in decision-making. We seldom “enjoy” the luxury of having all the information we need before making necessary decisions. Be decisive with humility.

Let's review the five anchors discussed thus far to hold us steady as we lead from vision to action. They are:

34

Speak Gracefully
Live Gratefully
Listen Intently
Forgive Freely, and
Lead Decisively

35

The final anchor is this: "Love Deeply"

Issue: "Value people, not power." (or position)

Principle: The evidence of leadership is seen in the lives of the followers.

36

- As leaders, you and I must keep remembering the many things we have in common with our colleagues and values we have in common. Focus on the things that unite us, not divide us.
- I often ask myself: Are MVNU employees stronger in their faith, more confident in themselves and more fulfilled in their work as a result of working at MVNU?
- Do I express appropriate appreciation, thanks and gratitude to MVNU faculty, staff and students?
- Over the years, I have tried to remember to trust my best moments when making decisions regarding employees.
- As leaders we must be passionate about communicating our personal and professional (institutional) vision, mission and values to those with whom we work or for whom we are responsible.
 - Talk often about the "overarching priorities of our group."
 - Collectively focus on our core values.

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- This is my bottom line: I try to enlarge the vision of my people about the work they are doing. I want them to see the big picture. I must assist them in discovering how they, in their particular assignments, fit into the grand scheme and purpose of the institution or region. I

want faculty, staff and students to feel good about working at MVNU! I truly seek to value people and progress, not power and position.

- Remember: the evidence of leadership is seen in the lives of the followers.

38 IN CONCLUSION:

A. Let me summarize these qualities that convict me at my worst and characterize me at my best. These “anchors” hold me steady as I seek to move the group for which I am responsible from vision to action.

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1. I really want my words to be grace-giving, life-generating and inspiring to others and not discouraging, depressing and draining utterances.
2. I really want to be known as a person who is forever grateful, regardless of the situation, believing that God is in the midst of everything I do and is working to bring good in every situation.
3. I really want to listen to and respect the people with whom I work, to understand them – and for them to understand me – even if we do not agree with each other.

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4. I really want to initiate forgiveness when I have been offended because I don't have the energy or strength to carry the heavy burden and guilt of an unforgiving spirit.
5. I really want to lead decisively even as I experience the pain of holding tenaciously to the vision while acknowledging the realities of my situation.
6. I really want my relationship with others to energize them, to have a positive impact on their lives and to enable them, in some small way, to grow – become stronger – in their faith, their confidence in themselves and their competence at work as a result of our interaction in the home and on the job and with me as their leader.

B. And, I urge every one of you to yearn to increasingly be a Christian leader in whatever work assignment He gives to you. Discover your own answers – inspired by God’s word and His Holy Spirit to this probing question, “If ‘In Christ all things are made new,’ then how does my relationship with Christ transform and convert the way I lead?”

C. Three fundamental convictions about Christian leadership in a faith community have risen within me as a result of wrestling with these issues, questions and leadership qualities. Convictions about:

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1. who we are as people of God;
2. what we are called to do in the work of God; and
3. how we live together as the family of God.

D. Jim Collins, in his book Good to Great talks about the critical characteristics of the leaders. He speaks of humility and fierce resolve as essential for Level 5 or top leaders. I believe that whatever else you discover in Christian leaders you will find that they:

42

1. Speak Gracefully. They watch the words they speak.
2. Live Gratefully. They don’t whine, are grateful.
3. Listen Intently. They seek first to understand.
4. Forgive Freely. They are proactive in extending forgiveness.

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5. Lead Decisively. They avoid paralysis in decision-making.
6. Love Deeply. They value people, not power.

E. I leave you with these questions: which one of these “anchors” do you need most right now in your leadership assignment? As you experience the tension between the vision God has given you and the reality of your present situation, in which of these areas do you most need God to hold you steady? As you move from vision to action, what is your greatest need:

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1. Speaking Gracefully?
2. Living Gratefully?
3. Listening Intently?
4. Forgiving Freely?

5. Leading Decisively?
6. Loving Deeply?

F. Be specific. Be personal. Be honest.

G. One more question. Which of these six anchors is your greatest strength? Again, be specific. Be personal. Be honest. It's vitally important for us to affirm our strength even as we acknowledge our need. Build on your strength. Work on your need. Now join me in prayer for that specific anchor you need and give thanks for strength He has given to you as you lead your people from vision to action.

H. Prayer.