

# VISIONARY LEADERSHIP: CHARTING A COURSE THROUGH THE STORMS

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By Glenn R. Mack

## IT'S BEEN ROUGH SAILING OF LATE FOR LEADERS OF CAREER AND

technical education (CTE) programs, with funding uncertainties and a changing workforce landscape, among other issues. What can you do as the captain of your ship to batten down the hatches, chart a new course and endure the gales? Today's leaders need to act as both the captain and the lookout for their team.

Using culinary education as an example, this article reviews visionary leadership and introduces two tools for strategic planners: environmental scanning and scenario planning. You can guide your capable teams to success by constantly scanning the horizon, charting and re-charting your course and manning the wheel to your destination. There is no single, correct direction. As a visionary leader, you must choose the course for your ship.

## Visionary Leadership

Not all leaders are visionaries and most visionaries are not leaders. How can you energize your people and transform the organization? With a compelling vision statement that serves as your North Star. Visionary leaders enable their teams to become *change-capable* as opposed to *change-averse*.<sup>1</sup> Employing the organizational development steps of mission, vision and strategic planning

can assist any leader with the navigational tools necessary for amazing journeys.

## Mission

A mission provides clarity to your team and its stakeholders by articulating your daily organizational function. All activities should support the mission. Its most simplistic elements are who you are, what you do, and who receives the benefit of your services.

Mission statements are a formal and systematic process in organizational development. Oftentimes, mission statements are victims of overzealous wordsmithing with flowery and forgettable prose. In short, a mission statement shows what's wrong in your world and how you intend to fix it. The vision, however, is what your world will look like after you've finished changing it.

## Vision

Vision is a realistic and attractive description of a future state. It serves as a bridge between the present and the future, and it is intentionally aspirational. To create your own vision, gather your main stakeholders in a room, brainstorm for an hour, take a break and then try to craft a short, memorable and meaningful vision. Don't get hung up on wording. Focus on the big picture. What is the bright future you envision?

What are the goals on the horizon you are aiming for?

Once the vision is in place, your organization can focus on action—the only way to achieve your goals. Your vision should become the organization's guiding star, documented and communicated to the entire team. As events develop or milestones are reached, revisit the vision and check if it needs updating.

## Strategic Planning

Organizations regularly develop and execute strategic plans. It starts with deciding where you want to go, how to get there and how to measure the results. Ideally, there is also a feedback loop to evaluate how the strategy was executed and how it could be improved. Environmental scans and scenario planning are two strategic-planning tools CTE leaders can employ to prepare for a rapidly changing educational landscape.

## Environmental Scanning

Environmental scanning is the study and interpretation of events and trends that influence a business or industry. It involves studying demographics, as well as political and legal factors that may affect the organization, such as competition, economic trends and advances in technology. Lookouts on a ship scan the sea for potential danger, making note of

everything they see and hear. You, too, should purposefully scan your environment to see which factors may affect your program or institution. Despite the fact that most of these external influences are beyond the institution's control, it is essential that planners understand these factors and their potential impact. Failure to do so invites disaster.

In the culinary world, we repeatedly scan long-term phenomena that affect the food system—such as climate, agriculture, demographics and trade relations. We must also keep an eye on the foodservice industry—consumer habits, emerging technology and labor force. We keep abreast of factors that may affect education—delivery, accreditation, funding, and adaptive and competency-based learning. Finally, curriculum and program outcomes are precipitated by industry currents—sustainability, modernist cuisine, pop-up restaurants, etc. If we did not keep an eye on these factors, we would end up lost at sea.

### Scenario Planning

Once you become thoroughly familiar with the factors that influence your educational environment, you are ready to construct various models or stories about the future. These scenarios are tools for learning about the future, not predicting it.

In his book, *Visionary Leadership*, Burt Nanus recommends that we consider the major changes that can be expected in the economic, social, political and technological environments in the future.<sup>2</sup> Note the changes that influence your institution and programs and then identify key themes or drivers like workforce needs, regulatory conditions and funding limitations, etc. Pick a range of possible outcomes—government oversight could increase or decrease, funding could cease or increase, an industry could die or specialize. Now you are prepared to write three or four scenarios. Ultimately, the best vision statement will be relevant across multiple scenarios.

In the culinary realm, one plausible

and disruptive scenario envisions a high demand for trained professionals in health-supportive cookery to care for an aging baby-boomer population. As income and prestige rise for graduates of such programs, student demand for the program increases. Resulting institutional obstacles might be faculty credentialing for a degree program, accreditation logjams that impede online or competency-based learning options, or insufficient technological resources to support more expansive offerings.

### Into the Future

In sum, strategic planning techniques that have served the business community can and should be adopted by CTE leaders. Experts urge higher-education institutions to prepare themselves for profound change through a process of orchestrated planning. According to the article “Strategic Planning in U.S. Higher Education: Can It Succeed in Europe?,” “The relative stability that higher education has enjoyed for centuries, and even in recent decades, has ended . . . . Transformational changes will occur at an exponential pace. The ultimate challenge for higher education is to understand, anticipate and

successfully adapt to this all-embracing metamorphosis.”<sup>3</sup>

The first step in crafting a vision statement is to survey the landscape to glean potential changes to the field. Focus on innovation, not hype. Remember that your personal experiences do not indicate trends and that anecdote is not evidence. In Plato's day, they chided the navigator as a useless stargazer, yet he was the only one with adequate knowledge to guide the ship. With a great vision born of environmental scanning and scenarios, you, too, can create a compelling direction for your organization. **Tech**

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### ENDNOTES

1. Hignite, K. (2007). Make the most of tomorrow. *Planning for Higher Education*, 35(2), 48–52.
2. Nanus, B. (1995). *Visionary leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, Inc.
3. Taylor, J. S., Amaral, A., & Machado, M. (2007). Strategic planning in U.S. higher education: Can it succeed in Europe? *Planning for Higher Education*, 35(2), 4–17.

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