

Confidence in Future Vision

A Critical Component to Employee Engagement

Future vision continues to appear as a key driver of employee engagement. It's a critical element that leaders and managers can, and should, be messaging to create a better workforce and reinforce employee engagement. Learn why it starts at the top with leadership and what can be done to create a more committed and inspired team.



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Future vision has continuously been identified as a powerful, consistent factor in employee engagement. It is a key component of the employee experience because when done well, it inspires each person by connecting their individual work to the broader organizational goals – what is more central to the employee experience than that? To back up, let's take the opportunity to discuss future vision in its entirety – what it means, what it has the power to do, as well as actions that managers and leaders can take to inspire, engage, and retain their workforce.

Future Vision Defined: Employee confidence in the future of their organization and the belief that leadership can guide the organization through the rough waters.

The Evolution of Future Vision

Given what we know about prior crises, it came as no surprise that future vision stood out as a prominent driver of engagement, based on engagement survey data prior to and during the pandemic. What did stand out is the evolution of the meaning behind future vision. As a key driver of engagement pre-pandemic, future vision was more about being part of an exciting future, an inspirational message about the short and long-term success of the company. During the pandemic, future vision shifted slightly as a key driver, and it was more about employees' confidence in senior leaders to navigate through uncertainty and the continuous change.

We can each attest to the fact that the pandemic brought about uncertainty in both homes and workplaces. As it relates to the latter, employees wondered how their organization would be impacted and what the pandemic would mean for their job security, let alone their thoughts, discomfort, and fear for their own well-being and that of their loved ones. People's most fundamental needs were put at stake. Leaders were given the prime opportunity to provide clarity and assurance during such a time of uncertainty.

This didn't require leaders to have all of the answers, but it did separate leaders who rose to the occasion from those who did not. Leaders who stepped up instilled a sense of confidence in the workforce that they would weather the storm and navigate the turbulent waters. Great leaders talked about being in a place of uncertainty with their employees, as no one person was unaffected by the pandemic, and such humility was inspiring. Future vision translated to employees as trust



in the direction, decisions, and leadership of the organization; instilling confidence and commitment. Such acts of leadership inspire optimism about the future, even when the specific answers remain unknown. Employees want to know the role they play in the future. When leaders can paint that vision and speak in a way that resonates at the individual level, employee's strengths, commitment, and motivation can be harnessed to achieve collective, aspirational goals.

Inspiring Employees Through Future Vision

A fundamental component of the employer-employee relationship is casting vision and strategy. All employees "rowing in the same direction" is a critical piece of collaboration and organizational success. Employees naturally look to their leaders for guidance and direction to align their efforts and collaborate with their co-workers. The most successful leaders can paint a vivid picture of where the company is going and the benefits of achieving those objectives. Within this message is an inspiring vision of possibilities and future successes. Each person hearing that message can distinctly see the unique and important role their job plays in bringing that vision to life.

Employees who are inspired by the vision that has been cast by leaders are likely to experience a sense of meaning and purpose within the context of their day-to-day work. People have always sought meaning, and if the pandemic has taught us anything, it is the

importance of having meaning. Over the past two years, employees across the globe were forced to slow down, make drastic shifts in how or where they worked and how they interacted with others, including family. This has simultaneously provided individuals with an undeniable opportunity to evaluate, embrace, and in some cases, change their priorities to align what they do to receive greater fulfillment. One of the most fundamental threads on that quest has been the search for meaning and purpose. This only reinforces what we already knew to be true, which is that people would often rather work for a cause, not merely a company or a paycheck. In general, people want to contribute to something larger than themselves and know they are making a difference. Insert the power of future vision, and it starts at the very top.

"Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality," states American scholar and organizational consultant, Warren Bennis. Future vision starts at the very top of an organization and is one of the most crucial responsibilities a leader holds. While managers undoubtedly support vision and strategy, they alone cannot move the needle when it comes to inspiring the broader workforce in a manner that influences them to care more, work harder, and stay longer. The best leaders have a knack for inspiring others by focusing on the "why," why the work matters. However, all too often leaders, and the communication that ensues, are preoccupied with the "what," what we are aiming to accomplish.

Circling back to the concept of searching for meaning, meaning comes from feeling as if one has a purpose, which ties back to the “why”. To successfully inspire the workforce, leaders must put strategies, initiatives, and direction into context – they must enthusiastically explain why “this” matters in the context of the bigger picture. And it cannot be just words on a page. Employees must be able to feel it, hear it, and see it in action over and over again as they carry out and see value in their everyday responsibilities. Another key piece of the puzzle is helping employees know “who” they are impacting. Knowing the difference made in the lives of others is undoubtedly motivating, but that picture is not always clear unless it has been explicitly described by the very leaders people look to for direction and inspiration.

Ultimately, leaders need to consistently answer these questions for their employees:

- Where are we going?
- What will it be like in the future? What are we trying to accomplish?
- Why is it important? Why does it matter?
- Who wins if we get there? Who benefits along the way?
- How does it involve me? How can I win? How can I help?

As WSA continues to monitor engagement trends and key drivers of engagement, the

importance of future vision is continuously confirmed and seen within the data ([learn more about the engagement trends](#)). Employees have, and still want, to be part of an exciting future within an organization, and they want to be inspired by senior leadership.

Given the context of the current environment during this phase of the pandemic and making choices about the future of work, employees also want to believe that leaders are navigating uncertainty and continuous change.

When that happens, employees are more optimistic about the future and more motivated to exert discretionary effort to achieve organizational goals.

How Is Future Vision Measured?

Here are core Future Vision items that not only give a great measure of effectiveness but also are drivers of employee engagement and retention:

- I believe this company has an outstanding future.
- The leadership of this company has communicated a vision of the future that motivates me.
- I can see a clear link between my work and the vision of this company.
- This company is making changes necessary to compete effectively.

What Actions Can Improve Future Vision?

Here are some action steps that leaders and managers can take to build engagement and positively impact retention by reinforcing future vision:

Leaders:

- Create opportunities to regularly share stories of success that include what happened, why it mattered, and who it impacted; reinforce how the success story aligns with the vision and shared purpose of the organization.
- Make a plan that ensures that every employee, both those who work onsite and/or remotely, has an opportunity to receive an update at least once per quarter that includes things like: highlights, successes, opportunities and contributions that reinforce the company's vision, and a vivid reminder of the purpose and vision for the future.
- Connect with managers and people leaders across the organization in a regular cadence to provide them with detailed communication around both the broader vision and the strategy for achieving it. Gaining employees buy-in is critical to inspiring the rest of the workforce as they cascade messaging to their teams.
- Openly discuss relevant changes the organization is making while also highlighting the reason for which they are happening and how they will impact employees. Describe how the changes position the organization for the future, especially as it relates to relevant competition and the desired positive impact.
- Reinforce how the efforts of employees across the organization, in all roles, make an impact on the vision and future state. Communicate a belief in the collective, yet diverse, efforts, strengths, and skills of the workforce and how success is only possible when everyone makes their unique contributions.
- Discuss wins, opportunities, and possibilities for the future with enthusiasm that all employees can relate to. Use language that everyone can understand and highlight the meaning or sense of purpose associated with those areas.

Managers:

- After leadership purposefully highlights vision and strategy within all company communication, reinforce the messages at the team or department level while highlighting the specific role the team plays in the larger context.
- When the team has played an integral role in shared wins and successes of the organization, highlight the team's efforts by linking their day-to-day work with the positive outcome and overarching purpose.
- Similar to leaders, make a plan that ensures every employee, both those who work onsite and/or remotely, has an opportunity to receive a monthly update that includes things like: highlights, successes, opportunities and contributions that reinforce the organization's vision, and a vivid reminder of the team's shared sense of purpose.
- Model belief in the vision cast by leadership through communication and enthusiasm. Employees need to know their managers are also excited and confident about the future.
- Vividly tie both team and individual goals to organizational goals. While people and teams work on different things across the organization, they should all remain aligned to a broader shared goal or vision.
- Recognize employees or teams who accomplish goals that align with the organization's vision.

Conclusion

There are many ways that leaders and managers can pull the lever of future vision to create a more engaged and committed workforce, and there is no time greater than the present to make it a key focus to drive workforce performance. It is an effort that starts at the top which should be continuously reinforced throughout the organization.

The more that employees hear leadership actively communicating about the future strategy and goals of the organization, the more confident and optimistic they are likely to become, which we know facilitates a more engaged workforce.

About WSA

We believe in the power of applying the right science to make people and organizations successful. We believe in empowering businesses to measure what matters when it matters – so they, in turn, can motivate their people to work harder, stay longer, and care more. We believe that behavioral science is the ingredient for ensuring that employees stay focused on the right things, at the right time, and with the right momentum. We believe that employees' lives are never better than when they are highly engaged and using their talents to contribute to a company, they believe in. And we know that you need a partner who has workforce performance down to a science.