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Find Shared Vision Fast Through Grounded Visioning

By Jay W. Vogt



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These days, when organizations need internal alignment but can't afford the time or consultants in which they might typically invest, they may want to use Grounded Visioning, a great tool that lets leaders of teams, organizations, or communities discover a shared vision of the future in only two to four hours.

Grounded Visioning is especially valuable to use with your management team, board, or program team when their image of the future is hazy, they seem to be pulling in opposite directions, or they lack a shared vision.

Dr. Mary L. Fifield, president of Boston's Bunker Hill Community College for the past decade, says Grounded Visioning provides a "roadmap to long-lasting collective commitment regardless of the group's size or difference of opinion."

Grounded Visioning has just six steps:

1) Assemble your stakeholders

Gather your group—board, project team, managers—for as little as two hours. There is no pre-work other than to review your guiding ideas, such as your mission or values.

2) Ignite your spark

Every visioning process contains an element that activates people's passion and touches them emotionally. When time is short, the most efficient means for helping people connect with their love for their organization is through stories, told using "appreciative inquiry." Organize the group into pairs. Ask each person to tell their partner what attracted them to this organization and what keeps them. Next, they share a story of a high point in their experience with the team or organization when they felt most proud and committed.

3) Share best practices

Have folks shout out what attracted them, or their interview partner, to the team. Write these down and enjoy them. Have a few people briefly share some of their high-point stories, and write out the main elements. Then ask the group to name common themes they heard. Write them down as a way to complete this sentence: "When we are at our best, we..." These stories, and their common themes, ground you and your vision in how you are when you are at your very best.

4) Share your dreams

Ask the individuals, still talking in pairs, to imagine a positive future for the team or organization. Using small adhesive notes, each of them then writes three dreams, hopes, or aspirations for what it could do or be. Have individuals come to the front of the group one at a time, reading their dreams aloud, and posting them on a large sheet of paper. Cluster like ideas together. When every idea has been heard, be sure they are sorted in similar clusters. Give each cluster a title as a header.

5) Select the best

When working fast, and trying to find common ground, there is no quicker way than multi-voting. Give everyone some adhesive dots and have them pick their top three, or five, from among all the

ideas that have been clustered on the large paper. Have everyone come forward and place their dots, multi-voting at the same time. This instantly expresses the group's preferences and identifies common ground fast.

6) Plan next steps

Ask who has passion to develop these emerging themes further and form work groups to plan next steps.

This process creates a vision of the future that is grounded in the best of the past—hence its name. It can happen in as little as two hours with a team. Mary Fifield has used a variation adapted for large groups with her internal and external stakeholders once a year for the past 10 years; she convenes a series of meetings with 125 to 250 people known as “Transforming Bunker Hill Community College.” Try Grounded Visioning and transform your own team and organization!

Jay W. Vogt, president of Peoplesworth, is author of Recharge Your Team: The Grounded Visioning Approach, published in January by Praeger. Jay can be reached at jay@peoplesworth.com.

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