

A Book Report on
Anticipate
(The Art of Leading by Looking Ahead)
By Rob-Jan De Jong

(Book Report by Gary Tomlinson)

Preface: What enables great corporate leaders to detect signals that their industry, or perhaps the entire world, is about to change? How are they able to place their companies in a position to capitalize on that change? And how can you become one of those extraordinary people?

It boils down to one word – **vision**. Leaders who lacked it have often guided their companies to obsolescence and failure. The rare leaders who cultivated a strong vision have disrupted industries, created new ones, and remade the world.

Fortunately, visionary leadership is never an accident of birth. This book will teach you the practices that can make you a successful visionary, such as:

- How to grow your ability to detect change.
- How to connect the dots among emerging trends to develop a coherent and robust vision.
- Ways to create scenarios that help you design interruptive strategies, products, and services that are game changers.
- Practical ideas and exercises you can incorporate into your daily routine to nurture your visionary side.
- How to speak like a visionary leader, present your ideas more colorfully, and ignite your followers emotionally so they'll put their best efforts into a commonly shared cause.

Change will always be coming. It's key, then, to see it as far off as possible and to maximize the time you have to prepare for it before it arrives. *Anticipate* will give you that long-range vision.

Introduction: “What’s the one word you find in every definition of leadership?” I’ve asked that question many times to audiences of senior executives. I know what’s coming. The word *vision* is always fired back at me. Apparently it’s a no-brainer that leaders should, first and foremost, be skilled in the art of looking ahead and have a vision.

But then something interesting happens. I point out that they are all leaders and ask them if *they* have a vision. Surprisingly (or maybe not), only a few, if any, of the executives raise their hands.

“Theoretically top of the list, in practice bottom of the list.”

This remarkable response got me thinking. If vision is one of the first things we think of when it comes to leadership – at least in theory – why is it so hard to find in practice?

We all recognize the importance of good health, and we find thousands of books devoted to helping us develop a healthy lifestyle. But that's not true for visionary leadership. There's almost nothing that explains how to develop and nurture our visionary capacity. At least not with the soundness, rigor and practicality you would look for with such an important leadership quality.

So maybe we can contribute the lack of visionary leadership to an absence of knowledge and understanding about how to grow this quality. That absence would explain the lack of developmental guidance.

Anticipate is about unraveling the mystery of the thing called vision, in its broadest sense. From increasing our ability to look ahead and anticipate the future to turning that ability into a compelling story that ignites your followers. It's about demystifying the thing leaders, and their followers, say is so important, but that they struggle with to put into practice. We'll take vision from the realm of the mysterious into the real world, providing guidance for those who wish to become a more visionary and inspirational leader. Hopefully that includes you.

The Vision Thing: Creating a vision requires ideas, ideally intriguing and refreshing ideas that trigger people's interest, curiosity and excitement. It requires engagement with your imagination and an ability to think outside the clichéd box. It requires an open mind and willingness to listen to others' unconventional ideas and, in a responsible way, incorporated these ideas into your own perspectives. It requires clarity of thought on what you fundamentally stand for: the values you maintain, the beliefs that are dear to you, the enduring commitments you have set out for yourself.

Finally, it requires the courage to voice your vision, to stand up for it, and to battle the resistance you'll inevitably face in return.

Short-Termism – The Battle: “Anyone who is willing to postpone the long-term strategy to make short-term numbers is in route to going out of business,” warned Bill George, Harvard Business School professor and former Medtronic CEO.

Short-termism is the biggest enemy of developing visionary capacity for both the organization and the individual leader. Compelling visions rarely have immediate monetary returns. In fact, the immediate consequences of a powerful vision might be detrimental to short-term results. The fear of affecting these short-term results often prevents leaders from making the kinds of organizational transformations they would want to make if they were faithful to their long-term view.

To return to Bill George's thoughts once more, he underscores this long-term responsibility in current leadership. “You cannot put a strategy in place today in the pharmaceutical industry, in the automotive industry, in the food industry with less than a

seven- to ten-year time frame. That's how long it takes. Particularly for companies going through a cultural transformation, it takes closer to ten years to get it done."

A powerful vision isn't just *nice to have*. It's the most important tool in the transformational leader's toolbox.

*"Where there is no vision, there is no hope."
(George Washington Carver)*

Part 1: Visionary Content

Powerful visions have at least four fundamental purposes:

1. *A Vision Shows the Path Forward.* A vision is the essential starting point from which to develop a strategic agenda that ensures you get where you want to be and helps you tackle any barriers that might come up in the process. "Strategic planning is worthless unless there is first a strategic vision," the prominent futurist John Naisbett once said.
2. *A Vision Stretches the Imagination.* A potent vision takes us beyond the obvious into the unknown and stretches the boundaries of what we conventionally think up to that point in time. President John F. Kennedy's 1961 speech to a joint session of Congress, announcing the goal of "putting a man on the moon by the end of the decade," stretched the imagination of a nation. It became not only a source of patriotic pride, but also a driving force behind a tremendous amount of technological and educational innovation.
3. *A Vision Challenges the Status Quo and Breaks through Existing Paradigms.* In addition to stretching the imagination, a well-developed vision can provide new and previously "unseen" opportunities. Challenging our current way of thinking can help us break through existing paradigms to find fresh ways of working, thinking and behaving.
4. *A Vision Energizes and Mobilizes.* Finally, a powerful vision provides something very few other leadership tools can: It has the potential to galvanize those you lead. A vision inspires people to put their best effort into the cause. It unites them around a shared purpose, gives meaning to their day job and mobilizes them into action.

The four purposes of vision illustrate the key differences between leaders and managers. A manager's role is a very important one (let's not underestimate the inherent difficulties of being a good manager!), but it essentially boils down to keeping things on track. A leader's role is fundamentally different. It's about transformation, about motivating and inspiring people to move toward a new reality. What leaders really do is prepare the organization for change and help them cope as they struggle through it. To achieve this

organizational change, a leader must stretch the imagination, challenge the status quo, show a way forward, break through existing paradigms, energize and mobilize people to follow...In other words, a leader needs all the elements a vision brings.

Core Ingredients of Vision: Let's dig deeper and identify the specific core ingredients that combine to create great results on the vision front.

1. *Setting Direction:* The element of direction setting is critical, because followers use it to guide the decisions they make, the initiatives they start and the priorities they set. Since the function of a leader is to produce change, setting the direction of that change is fundamental to leadership.

(Setting direction is only the rational, cerebral part; it needs something else, something more, to make it compelling and powerful. Followers need to feel something in order to really spark their enthusiasm. They need to be touched emotionally; they need to feel motivated and energized. When this emotional dimension comes together with the cognitive one, the inspirational level rises significantly.)

2. *Sparking Enthusiasm:* There are two elements that predominantly ignite this emotional factor:
 - 1) *Unconventionality.* Unconventionality triggers emotions such as curiosity, excitement, desire, optimism and empowerment.
 - 2) *Connection to a Noble Cause.* This connection sparks emotions such as pride, belonging, willingness, passion, nobility, warmth, empathy and trust.
3. *Logos, Pathos and Ethos (from the Three elements of Persuasion by Aristotle):* In order to persuade followers, a leader needs convincing arguments, the emotions they elicit and credibility. We refer to these three as Logos, Pathos and Ethos – the cornerstones for creating engagement.
 - 1) *Logos* means that the message needs to make sense and not crumble under scrutiny. Logos aligns with the *setting direction* part of a vision. Followers need to understand clearly and coherently why you are taking them in a particular direction.
 - 2) *Pathos* means the followers must be emotionally moved and touched by your words. In addition to a logically consistent argument, people need a more compelling reason to go the extra mile. Think about the way unconventionality and a noble cause work to create a powerful vision. They allow for an emotional engagement that goes beyond the rational and make followers part of something more meaningful and enduring.
 - 3) *Ethos* refers to the integrity and character of the speaker. If your behavior and integrity do not fully align with your vision, if your followers cannot associate your words with your character and your actions, the words will be considered empty and meaningless. Leaders need to exemplify the vision in everything they do, to connect it to personal values, motives and deeper emotions.

Part 2: Visionary Practices

Research results indicate a positive relationship between the presence of a vision and *employee satisfaction*. More interesting, it also indicates higher levels of *customer satisfaction*. Vision, when done right, leads to happier employees and happier customers, and thereby undoubtedly has a positive effect on the bottom line.

Made, Not Born: The potential to come up with, and hold on to and cultivate, a brilliant idea or a vision is within all of us. Visionary leadership isn't a personality trait. We all can work consciously and continuously to grow our ability to anticipate, improve our game of looking ahead, have more remarkable insights and become more inspirational in how we speak about the future.

Being able to think, behave, act and communicate in a more future-oriented fashion provides direction for the road ahead and guidance for decisions that will need to be made. It also inspires and fuels innovation and breakthrough thinking. And it energizes your followers with purpose and meaning.

There are two critical developmental dimensions for growing your visionary capacity:

1. *Your ability to see things early.* The first signs of change often manifest as random noise or faint warning signals, often at the periphery of our attention and far less explicit in their game-changing nature than they are later. Growing your ability to notice these signals early and recognize their potential impact is an essential part of raising your visionary capacity.
2. *Your ability to connect the dots,* to create coherence in the future you face and turn it into a “bigger picture” story. This implies constructively and intelligently working through the complexity of the multifaceted and multidimensional future.

Both of these concepts are vital dimensions in the development of your visionary capacity. **Please note that Rob-Jan De Jong's developmental framework on “how” to accomplish this has not been included in this book report. For that you'll need to read his book.**

Part 3: Your Visionary Self

Followers look to your vision as a guiding light for the decisions they make, the initiatives they start, and the priorities they set. These uses correspond to the Logos side of your vision. In addition, followers need to *feel* something in order to become ignited to follow you. That's the Pathos dimension.

There is a third critical element. It's the integrity, credibility and authenticity of the leader. That's the Ethos dimension.

You! Your followers will be watching to see if you really mean what you say. Are you willing to pursue that – possibly unconventional – path? They’ll want to see if you are prepared to make the required sacrifices, to change your behavior, live by your vision and stand by your vision when you’re under pressure. It’s the classic walk-the-talk, practice-what-you-preach thing.

This means that the importance of **you** in your vision cannot be underestimated. You play a critical role in making your vision powerful through the way you show up, the way you behave and the way you accept the consequences of your words.

Passion and Authenticity: Authenticity arises when people can see, smell and feel that what you say is entwined with something you truly care about – that is, your ‘Why.’”

Uncovering your most fundamental “whys” and “hows,” your core values and beliefs, are key to understanding your authentic self. When your projects, initiatives and actions are linked to you authentically, passion follows. People notice; your eyes start to shine, your tone of voice changes, your energy is virtually limitless and your passion comes to life. Authenticity radiates.

Please note that Rob-Jan De Jong’s tips on how to become your best visionary self has not been included in this book report. For that you’ll need to read his book.

Part 4: Visionary Communication

You can have great ideas, make the powerful practices second nature, have clarity on your core purpose and values and exercise the right behaviors for growth – but if you are unable to communicate your vision in a way that engages and energizes others, the Vision Thing still won’t work for you.

There are several specific visionary communication qualities that, when done right, will transform your story from something future-oriented but technical and uninspiring to something that invigorates your followers. Let’s start by reviewing some minimum requirements, the so-called hygiene factors.

Hygiene Factors: Hygiene factors is a term introduced by Frederick Herzberg in 1959 that’s often used in management literature to label those aspects whose presence alone does not provide positive satisfaction, but their absence results in dis-satisfaction. For example, a hygiene factor in a restaurant is clean tableware. Restaurant guests simply expect clean tableware, but they won’t return to the restaurant just because of it; however, if the tableware is dirty they will avoid the restaurant next time. Similarly, hygiene factors in visionary communication are important necessities. Getting them wrong will decrease the impact of your story, whereas getting them right merely provides a foundation to work from.

Three of the most important hygiene factors in your visionary communication are:

1. *Short and crisp.* You must be able to communicate the core message of your vision in just a few minutes.
2. *Positive and hopeful.* A powerful vision leaves no room for negativism or cynicism.
3. *Future-oriented.* This might sound like stating the obvious, but I'm emphasizing it because I've seen too many leaders fail to take this point into account. When give the opportunity to communicate their visionary ideas, they take their audience into the past, missing the opportunity to inspire and demonstrate their leadership. Instead, start with the future. Describe where you're headed.

The Power of Language: A YouTube hit features a blind beggar, sitting on a sidewalk with a cardboard sign saying: "I'm blind. Please help." It looks like a typical day in the life of a beggar; he receives some small change every now and then. Until a woman walks up, looks at his sign, picks it up, and changes the wording. After she leaves, he suddenly starts receiving more donations. When he recognizes the sound of her shoes returning, he asks her what she did to his sign. She replies, "I wrote the same, but in different words." As she walks away, the camera shows the new message: "It's a beautiful day, and I can't see it."

Some words move us, and others don't. It's not just the message that needs to resonate; the way it's translated into words also shapes its impact and the actions it inspires. That the hidden power of language: The words we choose affect our emotional state and memory, and can result in noticeably different outcomes. If you want your vision to reframe people's mindsets and move them to act, you need to use productive, active language.

Workhorse Verbs: One of the first lessons you're taught in writing class when your text lacks pizzazz is to scrutinize your verbs. Verbs carry sentences, and the ones that do the heavy lifting, bringing energy to your message, are called "workhorse verbs" or "powerhouse verbs." Workhorse verbs move your story forward, create powerful imagery, and convey a confident tone. For example:

Workhorse Verbs:

Discover
Explore
Radiate
Uncover
Transform
Engage
Mobilize
Propel

Non-Energizing Verbs:

See
Discuss
Display
Show
Change
Involve
Gather
Move

Notions of Loss: Contrasting your desired future direction with one that is undesirable to you – most likely the status quo, no change option – will unknowingly add more appeal to your story. It'll get people to agree with your version of the future much easier.

Alluding to this notion of loss is psychologically very powerful and helps battle the status quo bias that people fall victim to when evaluating their options. Setting up a negative frame by painting what failure to change would look like is more likely to lure them into action and free them from their risk-averse reflex to keep things as they are.

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words: When describing the future, you can't use facts and figures. You don't have statistics to prove your points. You must largely rely on your imagination. And to convincingly bring your audience into the future, you must unlock their imagination; help them envision a different world.

Memorable Metaphors: If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a metaphor is worth a thousand pictures. Metaphors do more than just informing and making the message stick. They also add a layer of emotion to the content. By accessing your associative brain, a metaphor immediately hitches emotions to the message.

Let Me Tell You a Story: Stories are data with a soul. "Data wrapped in stories have the ability to move people, to inspire people to take action."

Visionary Checklist:

Developing a vision is not a onetime thing, but rather a continuous process of reformulating your story; integrating new insights, letting go of ones that are no longer valid; imagining manifestations of changing realities; thinking through alternative scenarios; and revitalizing your story with new language, metaphors and anecdotes.

Logos: Is about sense making. Can you make the case sufficiently believable? People will need to understand it intellectually, so your content needs to make sense. Ask yourself questions such as:

- What is the essence of my vision? What is the key idea or key change that I'm envisioning?
- What is a hopeful formulation of this idea? Remember, positivism and optimism in themselves are not enough (and will be considered insincere if they fail to correspond to the brutal reality), but mindfully paint a picture of what could be.
- What developments or trends are – or will be – happening around us that support this direction?
- What are the clear choices made in this vision? What is not included?
- What are the consequences of not going in this direction?

Pathos: Your vision is a break from today. This means you are taking people into uncertainty and their reflexive reaction might be defensive. So you'll need to work to get them excited about it. Your passion will help, but you'll also want to intrigue, excite and inspire feelings of belonging and bonding. Ask yourself questions such as:

- What is exciting about my vision? How does it generate energy? How can I make it more exciting, hope giving and/or energizing?
- What will happen once we are successful in realizing this vision? How will it concretely affect my followers' lives?
- What image, metaphor or analogy best suits my vision and how can I integrate it into my story? What positive associations does it conjure up? How can these associations help people to envision the story?
- How does my vision fit with our legacy, core values and purpose? How does it relate to the "why do we exist" question?

Ethos: Is where "you" enter the equation. Inserting yourself into your visionary communication requires honesty and vulnerability. Beware that people quickly see through artificial authenticity; rather than uplifting your story, it will deflate it. So, reflect honestly on why you really care and make that tangible through anecdotes and stories in which you are the main actor. Picture the situation, describe the outset, name the people involved, mention your senses and feelings; in other words, make the story come to life. Ask yourself questions such as:

- Why do I personally care about the success of this vision?
- What deeply felt personal value(s) does it relate to?
- What anecdote – from my personal past (private or business) – explains my caring? When and how did I discover this personal value and how has it served me so far? (In short, tell stories!)
- What will I personally change or be willing to sacrifice (or have already sacrificed) to better align my behavior with my vision? Do I have a tangible example?
- What behavior(s), attitude or habit(s) do not fit with the vision and what will I do (differently) to ensure that I will not exhibit them?

Final Thoughts: A truly powerful vision provides direction and is emotionally engaging and authentic. It's an invaluable tool for leaders that allows you to do what leadership is all about: *to ignite others*. Deep down, we all desire to live purposeful lives. If you are a leader and intend to make the lives of your followers, as well as your own life, more meaningful and inspired, I hope *Anticipate* has been useful to you!

Message from Gary Tomlinson:

I hope you enjoyed reading this book report. It's important to understand this document should not take the place of you reading; "*Anticipate – The Art of Leading by Looking Ahead*" by Rob-Jan De Jong. His book contains so many more of the "hows" in creating and communicating your Vision that have not been included in my book report. This is an incredible read that will serve you well.

Enjoy the education and wisdom contained within this book report and feel free to share it with others because the "illiterate of the 21st Century will not be those who cannot read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn."

About Gary Tomlinson: *Gary Tomlinson is a business consultant and motivational speaker. He specializes in strategy-execution management. He works with senior leaders to help them clarify, deploy and achieve their organizational initiatives down to an individual level. Gary uses a unique and dynamic methodology (KeyneLink) that is part process, part software and part roadmap that enables his clients to close the gap between planning and implementation. You can engage Gary at gary@gary-tomlinson.com. To read his other book reviews visit his website at www.gary-tomlinson.com.*