

Welcome to this month's monthly team training. We're going to talk about how to find and cast a white hot vision. Let's start with a question, how's your vision? Personally, for me, sometimes it's white hot and sometimes not so much. Actually the longer you've been in leadership, the harder it is to have a clear and compelling vision. There's a couple of factors behind that. One, the world is changing so fast, or you've got so many challenges day-to-day, it's really hard to focus, or it feels so familiar to you that you're like, "Yeah, well, of course, right?" It's also hard to have a vision if things are going well.

Success can make you conservative, and eventually, it'll make you lose your clear sense of vision. Success makes you conservative because you're like, "Oh, wow, it's going so well. I really don't want to wreck anything." I want to take you through a personal journey that I went through in the summer of 2022 and take you back there to a crisis and vision that I faced. I was wrapping up my second year of doing this full-time, serving you in The Art of Leadership Academy and leaders through the podcast, et cetera. Prior to that, I had worked at a church, carrying a full-time teaching load, and for years before that, being a full-time lead pastor.

I had built this company really as a hobby. It was a hobby that started in 2012, and I meant to do nothing more with it than have a fun hobby. I got to the point where it became what it is now. I found myself in the summer of 2022 having a really difficult time answering a question that a leader I had on my podcast asked me. His name is Ramit Sethi, and I'd followed him for years. I was thrilled to have him on my podcast. Not a Christian, but he talks about what your rich life is. In other words, if you had no barriers, what would you be doing? My answer wasn't that good.

I answered him in the moment when he asked me the question, but really what I realized is that the answer to that question is more of the same. Then about a week after that, in the summer of 2022, I had an instance where I thought I would try to get a top guest from my podcast. I always do that. I do cold calls to people and I thought, "You know what? I would love to have Malcolm Gladwell on the podcast." Who doesn't, right? I love Malcolm Gladwell, have for years. I knew a few people who knew him, but I didn't want to cash in any chips, so I thought, I'm going to go the old-fashioned way. I googled how to contact Malcolm Gladwell, found the general inbox for his company, Pushkin Industries.

It was like info@pushkinindustries or whatever and did my usual cold call pitch when I'm trying to land a big guest for my podcast. What shocked me is the next day I got a response back. The person, I think her name was Nicole, who was monitoring that inbox, says, "I know who you are. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I think it would be great for Malcolm to be on your podcast." I was shocked. Literally a week later, I'm interviewing Malcolm Gladwell. Now, on the one hand, you're like, "Well, that's the best thing ever," and yes, it was, but it was incredibly anti-climatic.

Because I kept thinking in my mind, it's going to take two years to land Malcolm Gladwell, and to do it in seven days was, in the most bizarre and unhealthy way, a bit of a letdown. I thought, it's supposed to be harder than that. And that led me back to Ramit's question, which is, well, what's your rich life? I spent July of 2022 trying to answer that, and I realized I don't have a good answer. By the end of the month, I realized, I took the month off, I don't have a clear vision, I don't have a clear vision. This is a danger. Because if your memory exceeds your dreams, as Andy Stanley says, the end is near. I immediately confessed to my team, "Hey, I don't have a very clear vision."

Some of them said, "Yes, we know." I want to give you some signs that you don't have a white hot vision. Number one, you're delaying decisions. You're like, "Oh, I don't know," and you're just procrastinating. Your drive is suffering. You're just not as excited to get to work every day as it used to be, or your church or organization is heading in random directions. On the one hand, you're doing this thing. On the other hand, you're doing that thing. It could be that you have mood swings. Some days

you're lethargic, some days you're really excited, or you have brain fog. You're just not thinking very clearly.

Those can all be signs that you don't have a white hot vision. I realized this was my problem, and I decided to do something about it. I was going to spend three months praying, soul-searching, reaching out to friends, close friends, and asking them for their opinion and their advice. I realized doing what I do is going to get a lot easier if I can understand clearly and articulate why I'm doing it. The question is, where do you start? And to be honest with you, at the beginning of August 2022, I didn't know where to start other than I don't have a vision. I started with a simple thought.

I did some research, some reading, read some books, listened to some podcasts, and I realized, okay, the best leaders find great problems to solve. The problem you're solving has to be a big one. I realized the problem that I had been trying to solve in my head through the work that I do here is something along the lines of, well, we hope to grow by 10% next year or 20%, or it can't be that. It can't also be do a little bit better next year. It can't be more of the same. What I realized, really great problems are never solvable by Q2 of the following year. That's strategic planning. You have some stuff you got to be able to solve by Q2 of next year, but that's not vision casting.

I want to break down how to find a vision in a few components. Because while I was solving this, I started to take notes and I thought, you know what, I'm not alone in this problem. The first thing you have to do is find a problem. I realized that great leaders really set out to solve great problems. I listened to this podcast by Tim Ferriss and a guy named Roelof Botha. Roelof Botha is the CFO of Sequoia Capital. It's the biggest private equity firm in the world. Tim Ferriss asked him the simple question. He said, "What is the difference between all your investments," they've invested in thousands of startups.

"What's the difference between the entrepreneurs who make it and the entrepreneurs who don't?" He said, "Oh, that's easy. That is the problem-founder fit." I'd never heard about this, but as soon as he started talking about it, it made sense. I'm going to quote at length from Roelof Botha. "When you think about the founder prototype or personality type, most of us encounter challenges in the world and we just let it go. This is difficult. This doesn't work. This frustrates me. You just go, ah, whatever, and you move on to the next thing. Founders are these people who don't accept the world the way it is.

They want to change it. They encounter a frustration and they do something about it. Well, first, it starts with an authentic identification with a problem. I think that when founding inspiration, because if you're starting a business for the sake of starting a business, it's so hard. There are so many challenges on the way to building a successful company. If you're doing it for the wrong reasons, you're going to wilt. You simply won't persevere. But if you're deeply motivated by what you're doing, you'll keep going and overcome obstacle after obstacle. To me, that is one of the key starting conditions is the founder-market fit, the founder-problem fit."

I took that insight away and I thought, wow, what is the problem I'm trying to solve? I came up with a set of criteria, questions to ask. First of all, what's the size of the problem? Is it bigger than you? Is it interesting? Is it compelling? Does it resonate? Do you feel that problem to the core of your being? Are you willing to go broke trying? I heard Seth Godin in some of my research, he said, "People always say, what would you do if you knew you couldn't fail?" He said, "Here's a better question, what would you do if you knew you would fail? Would you still do what you're doing if you knew it was all going to disintegrate?"

I think that's a great question. In my early days in leadership, I would always say, "I don't know if this is going to work, but I'm willing to go broke trying." Now, I haven't gone broke, but we tried a lot of really interesting things. It's got to be that kind of a problem. Another way to look at it is, could this problem exhaust us? Could we be working on it years in the future and still not solve it? Is it too big to accomplish

ourselves? Because if it is, it might be a worthy problem. And then will it take all of our resources? If the answer to those questions consistently comes back yes, then you may have found the problem.

What's the role of your team on this? Well, I think you've got to involve them. You as the senior leader, if you're the senior leader watching this, yeah, you've got to have ownership and you've got to have stake in this game, but you're not Moses coming down off the mountain proclaiming to everybody what they have to be passionate about. It's not a blank slate, on the other hand, where you sit around and ask a team, "So, what are we going to do? What's our mission?" In other words, what you have to do is you have to do the hard work as a senior leader if you're doing this for your department or the overall church or organization.

You have to do that hard work, but then you have to involve the team so that it gets their heart as well. Now, what's the next best step? Next best step is to state your vision in a clear and compelling way. The vision answers the question of what big problem will you spend your life trying to fix? The bigger the problem, the bigger the vision. And then you've got to state it as a mission. What are you uniquely positioned to do and how will you do it? This is where we landed, and this is months and months and months of work reduced into, what, 15, 20 minutes. Here's the vision. The vision we came up with, me and my team, is this, to reverse the decline in the church.

When I felt that, I thought, oh my gosh, I remember the day that I heard that, I got so freaked out by it. I knew that that's important to me, but I'm like, well, that is a massive problem. I'm not audacious enough to believe that I can solve that by myself. I think it's going to take a lot of people. But it really resonated and I shared it with people. When I started sharing it with my friends, you know what they would do when I said, "So here's the vision that I think we're landing on to reverse the decline in the church," I got reactions from wow to oof to are you kidding me? I'm like, that's exactly what you want. You want it to be a big problem that's hard to solve.

Otherwise, I can finish it next week, and we're on to the next challenge. Other visions I've found really compelling. I served on the board of directors for a local food bank and their vision was a city in which no one is hungry. Now, that's a really big vision. Or to create a church unchurched people love. That's a really big thing. For me, when I led the church, it was to reach 300,000 people with the love of Jesus, because we had 300,000 people who weren't in church on a Sunday morning within a 30-minute drive of our locations. How about this one from Ben and Jerry's? "Make the best ice cream in the nicest possible way."

That's kind of cool. Or Southwest Airlines, "to become the world's most loved, most flown, and most profitable airlines." And then Nike in the 1960s, "crush Adidas." Literally that was their mission statement in the '60s. Not sure that that should be yours, but their new one is "to bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world." Well, that's very aspirational. My question is, what is the problem you are trying to solve? For example, if you're in kids' ministry, is it the loneliness, for student ministry, the loneliness and social isolation of kids today? Is it that you want to give every child another voice in their lives saying the same thing a loving parent would say?

Would it be maybe to connect spiritually disconnected people on the internet into a community that serves, loves, and shares together? You got to ask yourself, there's no right answer, but what keeps you up at night? The decline in the church keeps me up at night. What is a problem so big it's going to take all of you and everything that other people have got to solve it? I'll be working on reversing the decline in the church probably into my 70s and 80s, and that's exactly the problem you need. Then what you have to do is link the white hot vision to a renewed mission. See, vision is your big problem.

It's what you see. Mission is what you do and it answers the question, what is your unique contribution? If the vision is to reverse the decline in the church, our renewed mission, we phrased it this way, our

mission is to help church leaders identify and break their next growth barrier. This is the glue that connects everything I do in the academy. I'm taking you behind the scenes here. Someone recently told me that at this stage in your life, when you end up in your 50s like me, you often end up serving the person you were in your 30s. For example, if you're a drug addict in your 30s, in your 50s, you spend it trying to help drug addicts recover.

I was never a drug addict, so that isn't my thing. But I was a young leader, a 30-year-old leader, who had no clue how to lead a church. I went to law school. Nobody taught me how to run a law firm. I went to seminary, but nobody taught me how to lead a church. I found myself trying to figure out how to lead a church all by myself. I bought books. I sought out mentors. I went to conferences, and I scraped and pasted a strategy together. And now in my 50s, I realize, wow, I have the ability to do that for you. What ties it together, it's the growth barriers that nobody teaches you about in seminary, how to preach better, reach more people, how to lead a team, all of those things, how to scale your online influence.

These monthly team trainings are the things that often get left out by the other content creators and by seminaries, et cetera, et cetera. I love doing that. It's incredibly motivating, and I think because this is the stuff I wish was there for me when I was a young leader and it wasn't there. What ties it all together? When we looked at the bones and the sinew that connected all of the various things we do here in the academy and with my podcast, it's like, well, we're good at helping leaders identify and break their next growth barrier, particularly church leaders. Now, to reverse a decline in the church, we're going to have to partner with a lot of people because we don't do a lot of discipleship stuff.

But guess what? There's a lot of people out there who do discipleship stuff. We can partner with them. But what we do, our secret sauce, the mission of our company is here's what we can do, we can help you identify and break your next growth barrier. I hope this not only gives you a backstage pass to what's happening in my company, but I hope this helps you see how you can give new life to your current vision or maybe find a new vision. When you get it and it's white hot, it lives inside you, it becomes contagious, it spreads, it motivates you, and the why will animate and motivate and propel the what.

I'm going to give you some assignments in the team application guide that can help you find your unique vision and mission, including a 2002, over 20 year old, TED Talk by Chris Anderson when he inherited, actually purchased TED and began to transform it into what we know today. But first, he had to earn the trust of people who had been coming to TED for years and cast a new vision. There'll be some other resources there as well. Hope it helps. Let's jump into the team application guide.