



Perfect Vision

If we pay attention, we can learn some valuable lessons from the world of sports, especially the world of professional sports. Sean Payton, the head coach of the New Orleans Saints, writes about vision in his best-selling book, *Home Team: Coaching the Saints and New Orleans Back to Life*. Payton writes of the need to have a “vision” for a player *before* the player ever becomes a member of the team.

What does that mean? In the organizational (read corporate, or political, or educational) world, when we think of “vision” we almost automatically think about the notional, far-in-the-distance, somewhat idealistic narrative that describes how the company/institution/school will look at some loosely defined point in time in the future.

Most of these narratives begin similarly: *AJAX Company is a full-service, one-stop, transportation company dedicated to providing its customers with 100% of their transportation needs.* Vision statements have become common place in corporate America. Just like mobile phones, they’re everywhere. In most cases, a company’s vision is a general, broad, and often vague description of what an organization wants to be, but is not yet, at some point in the future. But, that’s not what Sean Payton’s thinking of when he writes about having a “vision” for a player. His concept of “vision” is different: It’s about the individual, a person, not a thing. And, when you think about it, it can have a startling impact on how leaders in organizations consider who they select, why they select them, and what the expectations for new members of any organization can be.

This concept of a vision for an individual is much more than *what can this man or woman do for us?* It’s also more than (in Payton’s role as head coach) filling a void or a currently open position. Creating the individual vision is about focusing on a person (candidate), not a job description. Yes, job descriptions matter but what matters more is how an individual can or cannot *make the job description come to life.* Again, in Payton’s case, when looking for a player to select to play quarterback it would be easy to consider candidates solely in accordance with how far they can throw a football, how tall they might be, or how fast they can run. If those were the primary criteria in Payton’s vision, he would have never selected Drew Brees. Leaders need to take some extra steps if they really want the people they are leading to achieve beyond the narrow definition of a job description. It’s not whether someone can perform a set of tasks, the primary question is: How will this person do the job? How will he or she make it work? What will it look like? This isn’t the responsibility of the human resources department (though they can help): *It’s a leader’s responsibility.*

How to Create a Vision for Someone You Are Considering Selecting to Join Your Organization

If you want to create a vision for someone, focus on the answers to these questions while keeping the person whom you are considering in mind:

1. Does this person *fit*? Before you answer yes or no, answer questions 2- 4 below.
2. Does he or she “buy-in” to what you’re trying to accomplish? (You’ll have to spend some time talking in detail about what your goals are. More importantly, you’ll have to spend some time talking about your own personal leadership principles. What’s right, what’s wrong, and everything in between.)
3. Will this person be accepted by the group, or team, or whatever collection of people there are with whom this person will be required to work?
4. Equally important as 3 above is: Will this person accept the group, or team, or whatever collection of people there are with whom this person will be required to work?
5. Are other people going to be better because he or she has joined us?
6. What accomplishments do you, the leader, have in mind for him or her *before* he or she ever steps into the organization? (I may submit that if you’re simply satisfied that whoever you’re considering will just “do their job” you probably don’t need to go through this exercise.)
7. *How* do you see him or her doing and saying things on a daily basis? (Here I want to emphasize it’s not so important to answer what he or she might do, as much as it is focus on how you see them doing it.)
8. When the season (any sufficient amount of time to measure) is over, what actions or accomplishments do you see this person as achieving? What accomplishments will you be able to point to that he or she was responsible for achieving that contributed to the group’s or team’s or company’s success?

Share the Vision

Simply telling someone that you see or want great things from them is not enough—it won’t cut it. Leaders, after they’ve created the individual vision for someone, have to share that vision. The more precise it is, the clearer the picture can be made by you, the more likely it is that someone can understand it, commit to it, and work toward achieving it. That’s perfect vision!