

“ A generous book about stepping up to make art, to matter, and to contribute. ”

—Seth Godin, author of *What to Do When It's Your Turn*

PROVOKING GREATNESS

Unleashing Hidden Potential



MISTI BURMEISTER

Author of the *Washington Post* bestseller
“from *BOOMERS* to *BLOGGERS*”

PROVOKING GREATNESS
Unleashing Hidden Potential

By Misti Burmeister

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Mrs. Taylor Mallory Holland, my editor. Your gentle, kind approach has been a guiding light through some of the darkest times in my life. Thank you!

Table of Contents

[Why Provoke?](#)

[Section 1: Vision](#)

- [CHAPTER 1 20/20 Vision: How Important Is It?](#)
- [CHAPTER 2 Inside Out, Not Outside In](#)
- [CHAPTER 3 Are You More Captivating than Angry Birds?](#)
- [CHAPTER 4 Can They Hear Your Music?](#)
- [CHAPTER 5 Calling a Ceasefire: How Vision Unites Your Team](#)

[Section 2: Ownership](#)

- [CHAPTER 6 Change Your Mindset, Change Your Outcomes](#)
- [CHAPTER 7 Failing to Fail](#)
- [CHAPTER 8 Take Ownership for Leadership](#)
- [CHAPTER 9 Empower Them to Provoke Their Own Greatness](#)
- [CHAPTER 10 Don't Hog the Ownership](#)
- [CHAPTER 11 Loosen the Reigns](#)

[Section 3: Intentions](#)

- [CHAPTER 12 Do You Know What You Value?](#)
- [CHAPTER 13 Culture Killers](#)
- [CHAPTER 14 The Intentional Culture](#)
- [CHAPTER 15 Will Growth Kill Your Culture?](#)
- [CHAPTER 16 The Thing About Feedback](#)
- [CHAPTER 17 How Do YOU Think You're Doing?](#)
- [CHAPTER 18 Who's Provoking YOUR Greatness?](#)
- [CHAPTER 19 Trust Me](#)

[Section 4: Community](#)

- [CHAPTER 20 The Need to Connect](#)
- [CHAPTER 21 Bumping into Each Other: Creating Environments that Connect Your Team](#)
- [CHAPTER 22 After Hours: Connecting Your Team When They're Off the Clock](#)
- [CHAPTER 23 4 Fears that Can Cripple Your Community](#)

[Section 5: Energy](#)

- [CHAPTER 24 Happy Workplace, Healthy Bottom Line](#)
- [CHAPTER 25 Is Your Passion Productive?](#)
- [CHAPTER 26 Running on Fumes?](#)
- [CHAPTER 27 Attack of the Energy Suckers](#)
- [CHAPTER 28 Energy Trickles Down: A Tale of Two Airlines](#)

[CONCLUSION Your VOICE in Action](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

Why Provoke?

“There are leaders, and then there are those who lead. Leaders hold a position of power or authority. But those who lead inspire us. Whether they’re individuals or organizations, we follow those who lead, not because we have to, but because we want to. We follow, not for them, but for ourselves.”

—Simon Sinek

What wakes people up to the greatness that exists inside of them? What is it that leaves people wanting to see beyond self-imposed limitations and achieve something meaningful, even remarkable? What creates the spark that pushes people into caring about their results? And how can you provoke—and harness—all that greatness in your team?

These are the guiding questions behind this book. Whether you’re an entrepreneur, a seasoned executive, a mid-level manager, or just starting out on your leadership journey, provoking greatness begins with recognizing the greatness that exists inside of you.

Attracting and retaining good people with positive energy requires more than a fancy title and the promise of a paycheck. It requires leaders with VOICE, who are capable of not only *seeing* the greatness in others, but also provoking it.

A Long History of Provoking

While the word *provoke* often has negative connotations—as in to provoke anger or an argument—positive feelings and events can be provoked just as easily as negative ones. My own life has been shaped by plenty of provokers—some of them helpful and some hazardous.

Whether it’s for better or for worse, being provoked isn’t comfortable. Most of us want to grow into our potential, but the change, learning, and vulnerability that come with the process don’t always feel good or safe. Provoking greatness requires a lot of hard “heart” work, and it’s also the best thing you can do for yourself and others.

Everyone has greatness inside of them; most of us just need a little help seeing it. That’s why, whether we know it or not, we flock to leaders who can help us discover our natural talents and guide us to challenges that will ultimately put those talents to good use.

In fact, I was provoked into writing this book by a coach named Greg Conderacci in Baltimore, Maryland, who has a special gift for helping others identify and communicate their purpose. I’d enlisted his support because I knew it was time for my message to evolve. The generational diversity consulting that launched my coaching career and first book—*From Boomers to Bloggers*—was still important to

me, but I knew I had more to share. I simply couldn't put my finger on how to package my new message.

In preparation for my third meeting with Greg, I pinned up giant Post-it notes on the walls and outlined the flow of my next speech, complete with stories and points to draw from each anecdote. As I talked him through it, he stopped me when I got to "Ms. Cays"—a story I often tell about the high-school English teacher who unknowingly provoked my greatness.

Ms. Cays was not my favorite teacher. She had all kinds of rules, and I was a teenager with raging hormones, a bad case of laziness, and a talkative nature that drove my teachers nuts. One day I walked into her classroom, late and without the essay I was supposed to turn in. My tardiness and missing homework weren't the least bit unusual, but her response on this day was.

When Ms. Cays asked me to see her after class, I knew I'd earned myself another detention slip. Instead she just looked at me and said, "If I took a wire, inserted it into your mouth, and ran it down your arms to your fingertips, we'd have a writer on our hands." Then she turned and walked out the door.

"A writer was born that day," I told Greg. "No, I didn't begin furiously writing that day, but I did write my next paper. The seed was planted, and 10 years later, I had a bestselling book."

"Misti," Greg jumped in, suddenly excited. "Teach me how to do *that*, how to get people to use their natural talents...*on purpose*. It's done unintentionally all the time, but certainly there's a science behind it. Go figure it out and teach it to me."

The VOICE Model

With a keen interest in discovering the *secret* formula for provoking greatness, I spent the next couple years researching the science behind motivation and studying provocative leaders to learn what they do differently.

While I did not discover a magical formula, I did find five commonalities among those who masterfully provoke greatness in others:

Vision: Painting a clear picture of an ideal future that inspires people into action

Ownership: Accepting full responsibility for results

Intentions: Being purposeful about intended outcomes

Community: Fostering environments where people feel connected to one another

Energy: Having passion and unstoppable drive at the highest level within a company

VOICE is the perfect analogy to reflect what's needed to provoke greatness. You must trust and use your voice to take a stand for greatness. If you don't trust your voice—if you don't believe in what you are provoking—you will fail. If Ms. Cays hadn't seen my potential, she would not have provoked my greatness. If I had thought she was trying to manipulate me into doing my homework, or to get me to do something for *her* good, she would not have provoked my greatness. Ultimately I

believed she meant what she said...what she *voiced*.

I have yet to interview a single successful person—and I’ve interviewed hundreds (dozens for this book alone)—who got where they are without the support and encouragement of others. Each of them shared stories about people who saw something in them they could not see at the time...and then VOICED it. As a result, these provokers gave them a new *vision* of what was possible for their lives.

This book is for leaders at all levels who want to make *that* kind of difference in the lives of the people they lead. It is for those who are tired of pushing people to perform and would rather create an environment where people *want* to give their best. No one is perfect in every area of the VOICE model, but in this book, you will learn how to systematically increase your effectiveness in each.

There’s No VOICE Without Vulnerability

First, a word of warning: None of the strategies in these pages will work if you’re only leading with your head. VOICE-inspired leadership also requires heart.

Most leaders would rather simply pay employees to push *themselves* to peak performance. But few people can do that. Just like world-class athletes have coaches, world-class employees need leaders willing and able to provoke them, and to challenge them with meaningful work.

A paycheck is enough to find someone who will put in the bare minimum, but attracting good people with positive energy requires more than a clearly-defined understanding of your product, market, and competitive advantages. It requires a *deep understanding of people*—what inspires them, what excites them, and what they need to be successful.

It’s emotional stuff, but it’s not weak or soft. It’s powerful and radical, and it produces hardcore bottom-line results.

There’s plenty of research making the business case for emotional intelligence, much of which I will share throughout this book. Yet far too many leaders ignore its importance. Why? Because it requires vulnerability, which can be uncomfortable—especially in the work environment, where there’s a prevailing misperception you’re supposed to know everything and be perfect. It is through our imperfections and mistakes that we learn, grow, create, and add value. And it is through vulnerability that we connect with others.

This idea is at the heart of Brené Brown’s groundbreaking work. Her Ted Talk, “The Power of Vulnerability,” has received more than 16 million views and has been translated into more than 48 languages—all because she has tapped into a particularly powerful truth: People are starved for connection, and they flock to companies, leaders, visions, and missions that help them feel connected to others.

In her book, *Daring Greatly*, Brown makes the connection between successful leadership and vulnerability: “If we want to reignite innovation and passion, we have to rehumanize work. When shame becomes a management style, engagement dies. When failure is not an option, we can forget about learning, creativity, and innovation.”^[1]

Vulnerability is powerful, and yet it is the very thing that scares many leaders away from being provocative leaders. It’s uncomfortable, unfamiliar territory, so they

ignore all evidence that “soft skills” matter just as much—if not more— than what’s taught in business schools. Numbers and business systems are easy; dealing with emotions is the hard stuff. It’s also the key to provoking greatness.

Vulnerability Required Beyond This Point

Vulnerability permeates the entire VOICE model. Holding a **vision** for a new or better future brings with it the possibility of failure. Being transparent about our **intentions** insists on vulnerability, as does taking **ownership** of our results (knowing we might be judged poorly if we fall short). At the core of **community** is authentic connection, which requires (yep, you got it) *vulnerability*. And having enough **energy** to push your team to the finish line means admitting you’re not perfect and that you need support, which sounds pretty vulnerable to me.

Throughout this book, I will share hard numbers, scientific research, and real-life success stories that demonstrate the effectiveness of the VOICE model. I will also share actionable steps to help you cultivate your own VOICE.

So are you ready to wake up to the greatness that exists inside of you? How about that of those surrounding you every day?

Section 1: Vision

Vision: Painting a clear picture of an ideal future that inspires people into action

Leaders who establish compelling visions for their teams don't have to worry about motivating people to do great work. When a team knows where it's headed, why it's important to get there, and how each person contributes to making the vision a reality, it remains inspired and focused throughout the long, rewarding journey.

When I interviewed Rich Fairbank, CEO and founder of Capital One, he told me about the visionary leaders who inspire him. "These leaders are fanatical," he explained. "They are on a quest to achieve something extraordinary, and nothing will get in their way."

The energy inherent in those words struck a chord in me. The concept of a "quest" is the perfect way to think about vision. A powerful vision is an outcome so inspiring that those involved in bringing it to fruition will journey to the ends of the earth to make it happen.

Yet despite all the evidence and arguments for the value of vision, only 3 percent of the typical business leader's time is spent envisioning and enlisting others in his vision.^[2]

If motivation really is this simple, why don't more leaders tap into the inexhaustible inspiration created by such visions? Why is "visionary" a title reserved for only a few, especially when there are countless books and articles detailing the importance of vision?

The short answer is that getting clarity around one's vision takes time. Many leaders think they need to spend their days putting out fires, creating business plans, and focusing on the bottom line. They don't make time for envisioning the future or sharing their passion.

Leaders and companies who *do* prioritize vision get remarkable results. While conducting research for *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, authors James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras found that "visionary companies" have outperformed the general stock market by a factor of 12 since 1925. They summarize:

Truly great companies understand the difference between what should never change and what should be open for change, between what is genuinely sacred and what is not. This rare ability to manage continuity and change—requiring a consciously practiced discipline—is closely linked to the ability to develop a vision. Vision provides guidance about what core to preserve and what future to stimulate progress toward. But vision has become one of the most overused and least understood words in the language.^[3]

To provoke greatness, you must quiet the noise long enough to contemplate where your ship is headed and why it's important to reach that destination.

In this section, we'll discuss three different but equally important types of vision:

1. The company's overall vision, as created by the entrepreneur or executive team
2. An individual leader's vision for his or her team, which is not necessarily the same as the company's overall vision but should be aligned with it
3. A leader's vision for—or beliefs about—the people on his or her team

Using these distinctions to guide the conversation, let's dive into the value of vision, how to create a vision that inspires and drives your team to achieve it, and what might be getting in the way of bringing your vision to life.

CHAPTER 1

20/20 Vision: How Important Is It?

“If there is one door in the castle you have been told not to go through, you must. Otherwise, you'll just be rearranging furniture in rooms you've already been in.”

—Anne Lamott

There's a good reason Steve Jobs didn't define his vision for Apple as: “To become the No. 1 computer company in the world.” That might have been part of his intended outcome, but it's not what moved his people into greatness. On the other hand, to have “1,000 songs in my pocket” did provoke greatness—in both Jobs and his team, enabling them to revolutionize the music industry.^[4]

The same goes for Jeff Bezos—founder of Amazon, owner of *The Washington Post*, and the 19th richest man in the world. He set a clear, forward-thinking, achievable vision for both Amazon—“to be Earth's most customer-centric company, where shoppers everywhere can discover anything they might want to buy online”^[5]—and then for the Kindle—to make “every book ever printed in any language all available in less than 60 seconds.”^[6] Today Amazon is the world's largest online retailer, and Kindle has become a household name.

Vishen Lakhiani, founder of online publishing company Mindvalley, has created such a loud buzz that people move to Malaysia just to be part of his vision. Lakhiani started his company while living in New York, having left his home country of Malaysia. At that time, Malaysia had very few opportunities for highly-educated, driven people, so many of the country's best and brightest left in search of a better future. But when Lakhiani's visa expired, and he was forced to return home, he set a new vision: to create a company culture that would attract talented, well-educated people from all over the world to Malaysia.^[7]

His plan worked, and today Mindvalley is revolutionizing the education industry. It has been named one of *Inc.* magazine's “Top 10 World's Coolest Offices” and won WorldBlu's global “Most Democratic Workplace Award” five years in a row.^[8] Not only has the company's revenue soared, but Mindvalley is well on its way to achieving Lakhiani's latest vision: to make “the world a better place by touching 1 billion lives by the year 2050.”

Vision is exceptionally valuable, but only if it inspires and provokes the people working to achieve it. Your vision must be a powerful call to action—an invitation to join your quest—and not just some verbiage to put in the company handbook.

Think Bigger

It's not enough to say you want to become the best, most profitable company. Every company wants to be No. 1 and to make the most money. Your vision needs to tap into something much greater than money—or as Capital One CEO Rich Fairbank put it, *something bigger* than you.

Here's what he told me:

The real difference in life is whether you're chasing your own greatness or chasing something that's great. So many of the people who have a quest are trying to pursue their own advancement, and they have great passion too. But from a leadership point of view, it's really hard to get people to follow that. Imagine going home at night and saying, "Honey, I am going to have to stay up all night working so my boss can get his promotion." I mean, that's not a quest that other people want to follow. In contrast, leaders who chase a quest that's bigger than they are, are often very successful, but success is a byproduct, not the objective function.

A compelling vision—one powerful enough to spark your passion, inspire your team, and keep everyone motivated when success seems impossible—captures exactly what you hope you achieve, why you want to achieve it, and *when* you want to achieve it. It is specific, measurable, and often has a date associated with it. It is clear, compelling, and consistently communicated. Most importantly, it inspires and engages everyone involved—the visionary, the team, and the community at large.

President Kennedy *didn't* say he wanted the U.S. "to become the No. 1 shuttle designer in the world." His quest was "landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth" by the end of the decade.^[9] As a result of this very specific vision, and his clarity about what was at stake if the vision was not achieved, our country reached the moon eight years later.

Likewise, Southwest Airlines didn't just aim to sell more plane tickets than anyone else. The vision was to make air travel accessible to the average person.^[10] When the company started out in the '70s, only 15 percent of Americans had ever flown. Now more than 85 percent have experienced air travel, in part due to Southwest's vision and efforts to make flying more affordable for all Americans.

Think Improbable, but Not Impossible

A strong vision aims high but is also achievable, which means you might have to set a new vision once you've succeeded in bringing the first one to life. Jobs and his team achieved their vision, and then reset—turning a product capable of holding 1,000 songs in your pocket into a device that does so much more. Imagine if NASA had stopped envisioning after reaching the moon. We certainly wouldn't have a monster truck roving around on Mars right now, collecting valuable information to help us better understand our planet and solar system.

To be fair, some visions are so big that their creators don't live long enough to see them completed. Consider, for example, the beautiful European churches built centuries ago—one etching at a time, one brick at a time, and one moment at a time. The original visionaries often died long before their masterpieces were complete. But the clarity of their visions compelled thousands of people to spend decades working toward achieving them. Today these buildings serve as exquisite places of worship and important pieces of architectural history.

Many other remarkable visionaries never got to see their dreams come to fruition, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, and Mahatma Gandhi. Yet

our world is a better place because they were brave enough to dream big, to set goals that were just this side of impossible, and to enroll others in bringing those visions to life.

If there's one common lesson we can learn from each of these provokers, it's that *changing the world begins and ends with changing yourself*. A quote often attributed to Gandhi: "Be the change you wish to see in the world."

This is not to say that being a powerful visionary means you must save thousands of lives, feed homeless people around the world, or usher in a civil rights movement. Many small visions have made a big difference in the communities they serve.

Marc Ecko says smaller visions can be more effective. He writes:

Visions *should* start small. They're incremental, like building Legos:
Snap one block to the next.
Snap another block.
Repeat.

Having an overly majestic "vision" can cripple you with pressure. When I started with graffiti, I thought about my next 18 hours, not my next 18 years. Free yourself to do the same.[\[11\]](#)

Wanda Alexis Alexander, founder and CEO of Horizon Consulting, Inc., has a similar perspective. She told me:

Sometimes when a vision is too specific, it is intimidating to your team and minimizes their ability to do their best, because they are always looking at a number and will compromise quality in order to hit that number. And if your team doesn't hit that specific number by the specific date you've set, then how does that impact them? You're going to have some defeated people, right?

Both good points. The size and scope of the quest matter far less than your commitment to achieve it. It doesn't matter how big or small of a difference you're making in the world; it matters more the difference you're making inside yourself.

CHAPTER 2

Inside Out, Not Outside In

“Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens.”

—Carl Jung

For your vision to be powerful, the results you want to achieve must be bigger than you. But since the quest starts with you, it must genuinely matter to you. It must tap into your passions and stubbornness, because if you’re not committed to it, why should anyone else be?

Many of the world’s most profitable companies and most innovative ideas came from regular people who saw something about the world that needed to change—something that should be better, something that irritated or frustrated them so much they felt inspired to take action.

Nick Swinmurn, the original founder of Zappos, started his online shoe company when he couldn’t find a pair of Airwalks in the size and style he wanted at his local mall.^[12] The Container Store also started with a small but powerful vision: to help people organize their lives. Frustrated with all the sugar in iced tea, Seth Goldman started making his own and sharing it with friends. People loved it, and there was nothing else like it on the market at the time, so he co-founded Honest Tea, which Coke now owns but he still runs.

On September 11, 2001, Jill Stelfox—then chief financial officer of Noblestar Systems—couldn’t get in touch with staffers in the company’s New York office. Then she received an email confirming a package she’d sent had been delivered. It occurred to her that something was wrong when she could easily locate a package, but not her staffers or even her children in case of emergency. Since then she has spearheaded several products aimed at keeping kids safe—including cell phone monitoring software for parents, as well as systems many D.C. schools now use to track students on busses and ensure faculty can quickly and easily make contact with parents in emergency situations.

Difficult life experience is another motivator for visionaries. After being crippled by tuberculosis as a teenager, Paul Bragg developed his own eating, breathing, and exercising program to rebuild his body into an ageless, tireless, pain-free citadel of health.^[13] Then he opened the first health food store in America.

Maimah Karmo envisioned her nonprofit while battling breast cancer. During that time, her fiancé left her and their young daughter. Laid up in a hospital bed, fighting for her life, she couldn’t pay her bills, feed her daughter, or handle her life. She was in her mid-30s—clueless about wellness and too young to have a nest egg. From her hospital bed, she started the Tigerlily Foundation to educate and support women under 40 who have breast cancer. One person, one mission, one hell of a success story.

Then there’s Jas Boothe, founder of Final Salute. While serving in the U.S.

military, she noticed an increasing number of homeless female veterans—many of whom were mothers who came back from war, wounded and/or traumatized, and simply couldn't get back on their feet. When Boothe did some research and learned that women vets were the fastest-growing segment of the homeless population, she decided to do something about it.^[14] To date, Final Salute has opened three transitional homes for women vets and their children, and has provided housing and emergency financial assistance to more than 300 women vets across 15 states and territories.

All of these visionaries saw something that was missing or something that wasn't right, and decided to do something about it. Rallying others around the vision in their hearts was essential to being the change they wished to see in the world, so they found people who cared about what they cared about. And together, they changed things.

Get Stubborn

One of the best tests for the strength of your vision is how much you want it—how much passion it stirs inside of you and how adamant you are that it *must* be achieved. If your vision doesn't bring out the stubbornness in you, it certainly won't elicit a strong commitment from others. When you're clear about what taps into your stubbornness and invokes the “failure-is-not-an-option” mentality, you can push past perceived barriers and achieve what seems impossible.

Of course, stubbornness can also come back to bite you in the you-know-what. So let me be clear: Stubborn adherence to your vision is critical. But on the journey to achieving it, flexibility is also required.

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos knows how to strike the right balance. As Zach Bulygo writes:

According to Bezos, good entrepreneurs must be stubborn and flexible. When referring to Amazon, Bezos says, “We are stubborn on vision. We are flexible on details.”

Sticking to the vision is the first part, and being flexible about the tactics is the second part. Bezos adds, “If you're not stubborn, you'll give up on experiments too soon. And if you're not flexible, you'll pound your head against the wall and you won't see a different solution to a problem you're trying to solve.”^[15]

Flexibility is also critical for enlisting others in your vision. People get in stubborn pursuit of visions they help to create. Give your employees the opportunity to be a part of the vision creation process, and watch as their personal accountability and sense of ownership naturally emerge.

Get Passionate

A vision is an outcome so clear and inspiring that the visionary will not stop until it is achieved. It is that incessant passion and focused action that inspires others

to jump on board. Why? Because passion is contagious.

Effective leaders don't just know *what* they want to accomplish; they know *why* it's important and why they're working so hard to achieve it. When they share that passion, they attract others who want the same things and believe the same way they do.

The problem is, fewer than 20 percent of leaders have a strong sense of their own individual purpose.^[16] And without knowing what drives you, it will be difficult to show the way for others.

Most people are waiting for someone to inspire them, rather than taking steps to inspire themselves. This reality is both a challenge and an opportunity for those who want to provoke greatness—both inside themselves and in others. People are hungry for inspiration, and if you can tap into that need, they'll line up to support your vision. But first, you must tap into what inspires *you*.

In other words, to provoke greatness, you must be willing to be provoked. The change and the challenge come from letting life touch you—letting your experiences, passion, and sense of purpose lead the way.

Without Inspiration, Visionaries Are Blind

Provokers simply cannot live lives void of inspiration and then expect to inspire others. Here are just a few ways to sprinkle inspiration into your day:

- **Join automobile university**—a phrase I first heard used by Zig Ziglar. Use your commute time to listen to inspirational CDs, podcasts, audiobooks, or TED Talks.
- **Stop and smell the roses.** Spending time outside—gardening, hiking, bird watching, playing sports, or lying on a beach—is a great way to spur creativity and ground yourself emotionally.
- **Find your muse.** There is something magical that happens when I hear a musician belt out a beautiful song or watch a photographer who loves his craft get into the moment. The artist's passion elicits the same response in me, and I can't help but be inspired.
- **Take me out to the ballgame.** Watching athletes who are passionate about their sport—who love the game and train hard to be their very best—can also be an inspirational experience.
- **Get away from it all.** Travel is a great way to gain new perspectives and see things in a fresh light. Experiencing new cultures and seeing new parts of the world can open your mind to ideas you never considered.
- **Quiet the noise.** Meditation is a great way to slow your brain down and clear your head of all the thoughts that distract you and prevent inspiration.

For a longer list of ways to keep yourself inspired, visit www.MeasurableGreatness/HowToProvoke.

CHAPTER 3

Are You More Captivating than Angry Birds?

“When in doubt, make a fool of yourself. There is a microscopically thin line between being brilliantly creative and acting like the most gigantic idiot on earth. So what the hell, leap.”

—Cynthia Heimel

Like attracts like. Just as passionate knitters, birdwatchers, video gamers, and chess players seem to find each other, so do people with other common passions and interests. When you know what inspires you and begin taking steps in the direction of your passion, others with common passions will emerge to help you get there.

Highly-motivated, innovative people with a passion for technology tend to seek opportunities with innovative, visionary companies such as Google, Facebook, or Apple. High-achievers who love food tend to be attracted to Whole Foods, Trader Joe’s, and health food stores. Likewise, those who are passionate about the outdoors flock to companies like Recreational Equipment Inc. (REI), Patagonia, or Cabela’s.

When you declare a strong and compelling vision like these companies have, you attract people who are similarly motivated to make a difference in your industry. On the other hand, when your vision is unclear, you attract people with the same lack of clarity, energy, and enthusiasm. So if your productivity, retention, and employee-engagement levels aren’t where you want them to be, chances are that you haven’t established and communicated a strong and compelling vision.

From Disengaged to Unstoppable

Consider the following example: My friend Stacey had been working with a new video game company for about six months when I asked her, “What’s the vision for this game you’re working on?”

“We don’t really have a vision,” Stacey said. “The CEO and another employee have been brainstorming about it for months, but they’ve yet to create an ‘official’ vision.”

Then about a year into product development, the company hired a new creative director, Anthony. In just two weeks, Anthony created his own vision for the product, called an all-hands meeting to share his vision, and explained exactly how each department’s contributions mattered.

“These guys usually sit in meetings, slumped over, playing Angry Birds on their phones,” Stacey told me. “But ever since *that* meeting, they look like this...” She set her iPhone aside, pulled her chair up to the table, and started excitedly bouncing her legs. “When I asked a couple of the guys why they couldn’t sit still, they said they were excited to get back to work.”

That’s the power of a vision!

From the Boardroom to the Summit

Companies lose countless dollars each year because of distracted, disengaged,

unmotivated employees. Believe it or not, Angry Birds alone costs businesses up to \$1.5 billion in lost wages.^[17] But as addictive as game apps might be, when you have an inspiring vision, you can win their attention away from their smartphones and put it where it needs to be—on doing the work that supports the vision.

Why do more than 50,000 people risk their lives each year attempting to summit Mt. Kilimanjaro?^[18] There are countless reasons people climb, but the most common response is related to their desire to achieve something great—something they'll always remember and that they can be remembered for.

The same is true for teams like Anthony's. I know several people in the video game industry. All of them talk about the same goal: to get "a successful title under my belt." They want to be able to tell people, "Hey, I worked on that," and to feel the sense of accomplishment that comes with creating something people enjoy.

By clearly defining his vision for the game (or "the summit") and tapping into the passions of his team members, Anthony didn't just capture their attention. He inspired them to work harder than ever to accomplish the vision. And it paid off.

Stacey later told me that before launching new products, video game companies often hire psychologists to ensure their products get the desired emotional response from customers. These doctors hook up electrodes to beta testers, and track when and how they respond while playing—when a certain level is too frustrating or not challenging enough.

When the results came back for this particular game, it was clear Anthony knew what he was doing. "We started getting a huge increase in the emotional responses we were looking for once there was a vision for the game," Stacey told me. "You can actually see the difference in the results before Anthony was hired and after he came on board."

So have you identified *your summit*? Does your team know exactly where you're taking them and why it's so important to get there? And just as importantly, do they understand the roles they have to play along the way?

What's Your Summit?

It doesn't matter if you're the CEO, a first-tier manager, or a brand new employee with a clear and compelling vision; you have the power to captivate and create extraordinary results. Consider the following when defining your summit:

- **Do your homework.** Before Anthony could create something exciting to aim for, he had to understand what each team was doing and why. He had to understand the product they were working on, the audience they were creating it for, and what *excited him* about the product.
- **Go big.** An exciting vision must be something that will not only make money, but also capture and retain the team's attention and devotion.
- **Acknowledge.** People don't trust change, unless they understand why it's happening. To get his team on board, Anthony had to acknowledge where they'd been and help them visualize where they could go.
- **Electrify.** The most clearly articulated vision means nothing if it doesn't truly excite its creator. If Anthony hadn't cared about these people and

the product, his team would have sensed that, and it's unlikely they would have been excited. But leaders who are genuinely passionate about what they've set out to achieve have a contagious positive energy.

- **Reinforce.** One inspiring meeting would not have kept the attention of employees long-term. According to Stacey, Anthony continually communicates and reinforces his vision, both with new and existing employees.

For a step-by-step guide to vision setting, visit www.MeasurableGreatness.com/HowToProvoke.