Case Notes

# Chapter 7: Creating a Vision

# Case 7.1: A Clean Slate

## Case Summary

As a newspaper editor responsible for delivering printed content to a Midwestern town, Nick Gibbons was now forced to reconfigure his paper to mostly digital content and downsize his staff. This would require 75% of his workforce losing their positions with the newspaper. Nick was put in a position where he had to reconfigure his staff and start from the ground up to bring a new vision to the newspaper.

Nick engaged in three-prong approach which included (1) sharing with his staff that they had three months to reapply for new positions within the company, (2) downsizing the office to a smaller, yet more visible location to increase community visibility, and (3) willingness to forgive errors as his employees would be transitioning into new roles they had not been previously used to.

Gibbons’s approach caused many subscribers to cancel and many advertisers to cancel their subscriptions, however, he focused on long-term strategic planning due to the major conversion of paper-based content to digital content. After four years, the newspaper is finally starting to recover from the changeover, and is gaining back readers and advertisers.

Case Analysis

This case study focuses on a major industry **change**, which required editor, Nick Gibbons, to alter his newspaper’s **vision**, with appropriate strategic planning for the long-term. Gibbons was forced to deliver difficult news to his staff, however, his **values** remained in place, and he chose to retain as many of his staff as he could, as long as they were committed to the newspaper industry not remaining in the **status quo**.

Gibbons provided a clear **map** to his employees working with him on the digital changeover. He permitted them to experiment and make mistakes, as long as the overall company vision was addressed. Finally, he realized that the changeover would be a **challenge**, and it would take time in order to fully convert readers and advertisers to a new format and a new style of news content. He clearly articulated his expectations, and knew that planning for the long-term was a smarter strategic move than remaining stagnant in the industry.

## Sample Answers to Case Questions

*1. What is Nick Gibbons’s vision in this case study? How is it similar to or different from the vision of the owners of the paper? Discuss the unique challenges a leader faces when required to implement a vision of his or her superiors.*

Nick’s vision was to report the news and inform the community, no matter what format of media he was required to use. Thus, when the owners of the paper informed him he would be switching to a mostly digital content, although he wasn’t necessarily supportive of that vision, he began brainstorming ways in which he could make that vision work within his position. His vision was similar to the upper-level management of the newspaper; however, the format of content delivery he preferred was different.

When leaders are forced to implement a vision of their superiors, they might feel conflict with their own values and vision. However, in situations like the one explained in this case study, the leader (Nick) can implement parts of his own vision in conjunction with the vision of his superiors.

*2. Why do you think Nick wanted to open the workings of the paper up to the public? How is this related to his vision?*

Nick realized that in the short-term, consumers would not adjust well to the format of news distribution changing. Because of this, he knew that he had to at least have a visual presence where consumers would not forget the newspaper was a part of the city. This relates to Nick’s vision of making sure the news itself was visible and informing the community, which supports the newspaper’s new physical location being visible to the community.

*3. Visions usually require changing people’s values. What desired changes in values are highlighted by this case study?*

Nick realized that the newspaper industry had changed with the increase of the Internet as a viable news source. This required Nick to change his vision of printing daily newspapers to a new format and hire new employees while retaining employees that supported the new vision for the future. He gave his employees three months to understand the new direction for the newspaper and determine whether or not they wanted to be a part of the change.

*4. How well did Nick Gibbons articulate his vision for the paper? If you were in Nick’s shoes, how would you articulate your vision in this case?*

Nick’s first step was convincing his staff that they would have to “forge the future for local journalism and make a contribution to this movement.” He retained staff members that were willing to support that vision and allowed them the opportunity to grow and learn in a new climate. Nick also ensured that any mistakes would not be heavily scrutinized, and employees would be treated fairly as long as they showed dedication and determination.

Nick articulated his vision very well. He had a directive that whether or not he agreed with it, he still followed, and mapped out a plan in support of the directive. Elements of his leadership were present in all three of his approaches.

*5. Do you think the newspaper will thrive under Nick’s leadership? Why?*

Yes, the newspaper should thrive under Nick’s leadership. Nick appropriately planned for a changing industry and retained employees that supported his vision. Nick also realized that change would not happen overnight and prepared for the repercussions associated with loss of revenue in advertisements and subscriptions. By believing in his strategic plan and associated vision, Nick knew that his newspaper would eventually be successful in a new industry climate.