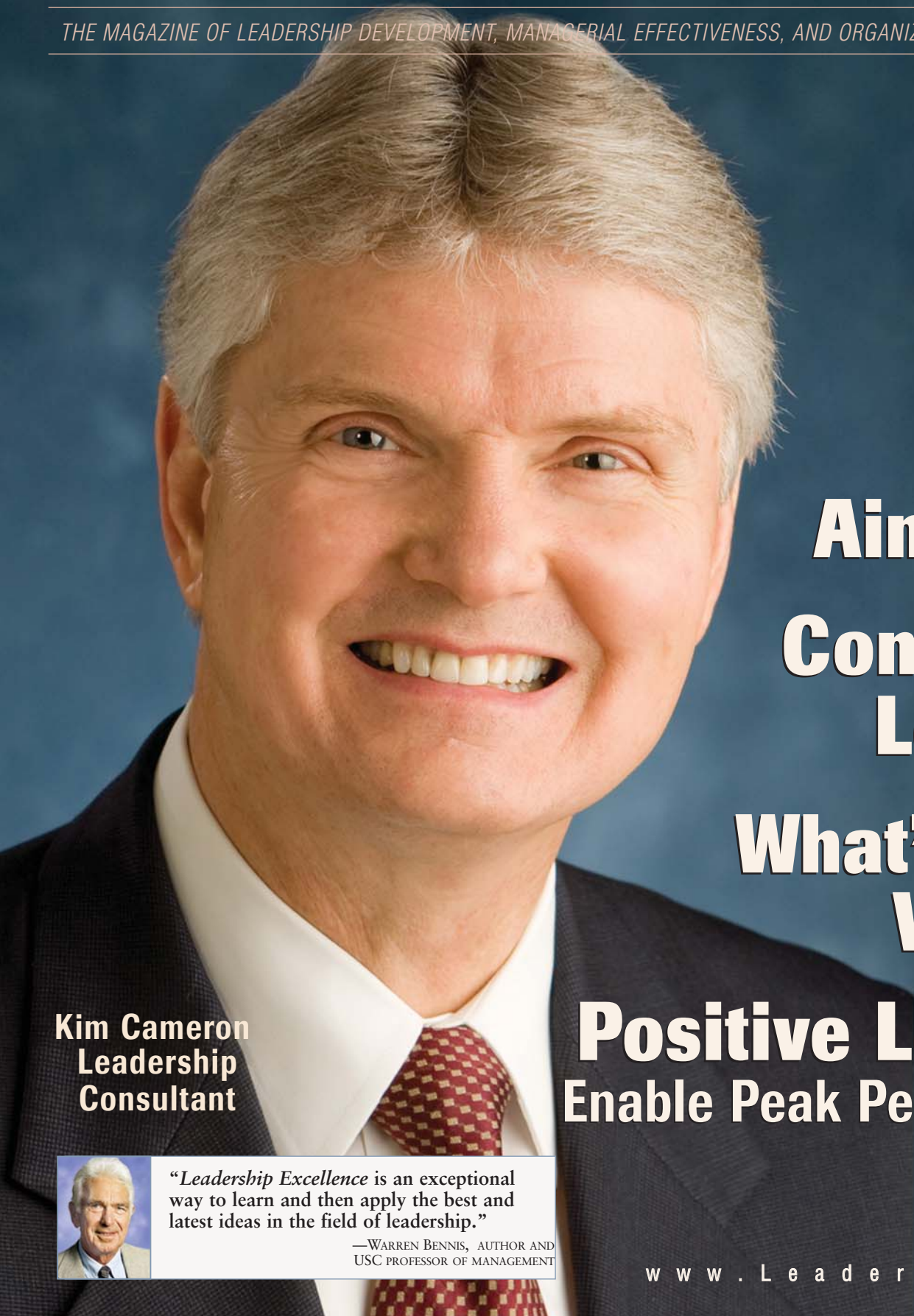


# LEADERSHIP *Warren Bennis* Excellence



THE MAGAZINE OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY

MARCH 2010



**Aim 2010**

**Convening  
Leaders**

**What's Your  
Vision?**

**Positive Leaders  
Enable Peak Performance**

**Kim Cameron  
Leadership  
Consultant**



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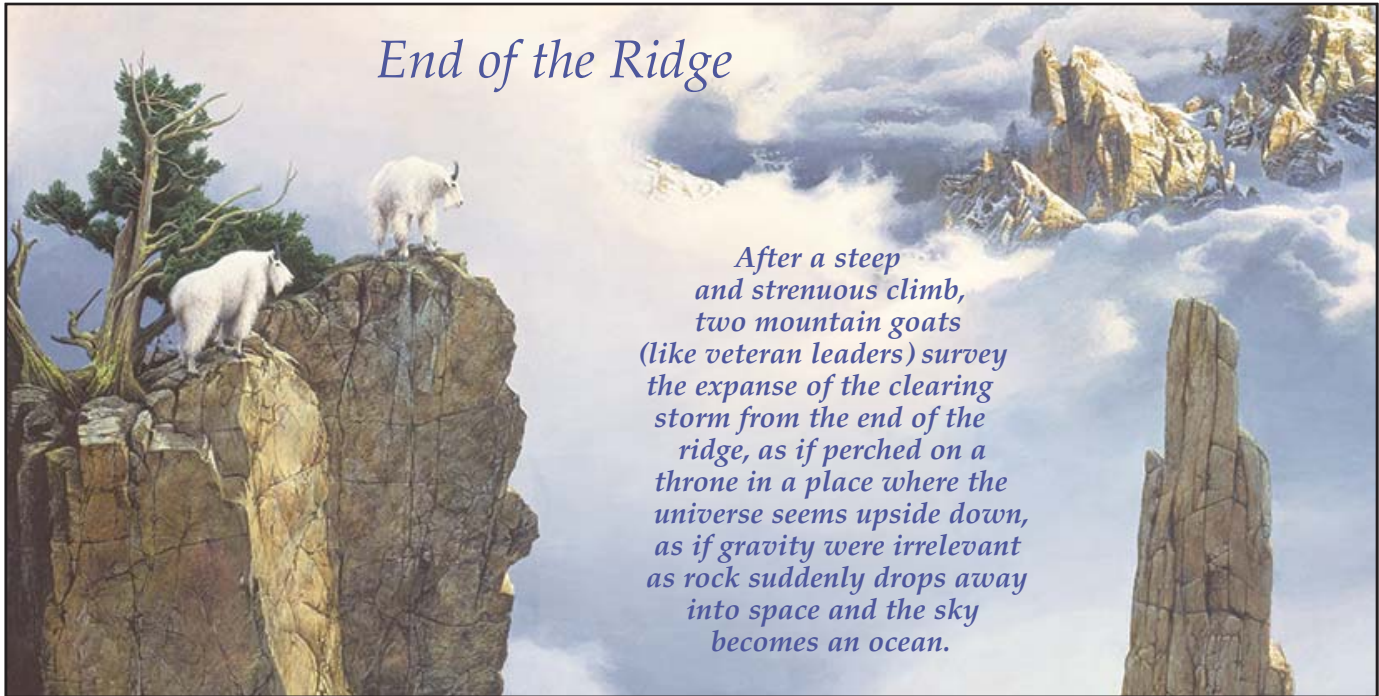
—WARREN BENNIS, AUTHOR AND  
USC PROFESSOR OF MANAGEMENT

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 VOL. 27 NO. 3 MARCH 2010



## End of the Ridge

*After a steep and strenuous climb, two mountain goats (like veteran leaders) survey the expanse of the clearing storm from the end of the ridge, as if perched on a throne in a place where the universe seems upside down, as if gravity were irrelevant as rock suddenly drops away into space and the sky becomes an ocean.*

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# What's Your Vision?

*Put passion and meaning into it.*



by Tara Jones

**H**OW MANY PEOPLE could state your company's vision with accuracy, without hesitation, and with enough passion and belief to inspire others to be excited and motivated to work toward it? It is not enough to be able to recite a vision—it must be lived in a way that enables you to achieve it.

How can you make your vision compelling and come alive so that it focuses your people's energy toward creating a desired future? Creating a vision that inspires everyone to deliver extraordinary performance is difficult. Underestimating the challenge is a common pitfall among leaders who then make mistakes at each of three key stages of the visioning process: creating, sharing, and living the vision.

- **Creating the vision.** Leaders create a vision in isolation. The Board lock themselves away behind closed doors. They fail to involve the people they intend to inspire and motivate. Leaders fail to ensure the alignment of the vision with the organization's shorter term goals and aspirations. The vision is so far into the future that people feel it has little relevance to their day-to-day work and lose interest in it.

- **Sharing the vision.** Leaders unveil a vision at a launch event. The newly-branded vision is then distributed in the form of wall posters, mouse pads, screen savers, and banners. People do not feel connected to the vision; it is meaningless to them. Ultimately, they criticize and ridicule the vision. Leaders do not talk passionately about the vision, failing to conjure up the emotion and feelings that will engage their people. The vision is communicated by leaders in a transactional way, as a set of clinical statements about conquering the market sector. This lacks the emotional connection that will transform behavior and ignite the desire to turn the vision into reality.

- **Living the vision.** Leaders fail to walk the talk; their actions are incongruent to the vision they espouse. They forget about their visibility, and how everyone is watching their every move and

listening closely to their every word! Leaders fail to ensure that performance measures are linked to the vision. Goals are set, yet the leaders rarely define how they will help achieve the vision. Employees are unclear about how they are contributing to the vision, rendering it meaningless to them.

## Why Is a Vision So Important?

Since creating, sharing, and living the vision in a way that maximizes impact is challenging, is it worth all the effort? Visions predict employee commitment to the organization, an emotional bond that propels people into action, and predict performance. Further, visionary leadership predicts various positive outcomes, including individual and team performance,



employee satisfaction, trust in the leader, and employee motivation. The second-highest requirement of a leader is that he or she be forward-looking.

**You need to get your vision right!** But what does *getting it right* mean?

Let me tell you about my observations and experiences of two companies—one where the vision had a negative impact, and one where the effect was positive—to highlight the key requirements of getting the vision right.

In the first company, rather than galvanize its people in a motivating way, the visioning process de-motivated them. The company, a large retail organization, had recently made an acquisition. The acquiring company was conservative, traditional, autocratic, and slow in decision-making. The organization being acquired was progressive, collaborative, fast-moving, and innovative. The leaders knew they had to develop a compelling vision

that would bring everyone together and harness their energy.

They made two big mistakes. First, the Board created the vision in isolation rather than consult with people in both companies. And the Board was primarily comprised of members of the acquiring company. The resulting vision was biased toward the acquiring company. Hence, the new vision de-motivated those from the acquired company who felt that their success, philosophy, and approach had been ignored. They became less committed. The resulting reduction in morale and engagement, which in turn lead to more turnover of high performers from the acquired company, hurt performance. By failing to integrate the successes of both companies, the new Board lost many of the great people and things that had made the acquired company so appealing.

The second mistake they made was to communicate the vision solely through one-way *town hall* speeches, at which a Board member presented the vision passionately, but in a prepared and polished way. In the Q & A session, many employees felt uncomfortable asking questions, and so left feeling unclear about the message, how the vision was to be lived, and how things would be different. The Board had not allowed people to discuss and make sense of the vision and what it *really* meant to their day-to-day work life.

**An example of getting it right** can be found in a global financial institution that had just undergone a restructure, resulting in much uncertainty and ambiguity. The senior leadership team (SLT) recognized the need to update their vision to provide a future view which would re-engage their people and restore belief in the company. The SLT ran focus groups comprised of people from various levels to understand employees' opinions about the direction the organization needed to go, the future they hoped for, and the type of place they wanted the company to be. Armed with this information, the SLT generated a compelling vision that captured the hopes of employees.

They then shared the new vision in a way that engaged the employees and minimized their uncertainty and ambiguity. The SLT delivered the usual *road shows*, but also ensured that employees attended mini-workshops in which the SLT shared their understanding of the vision, and explained what it meant to them and how people could see how the leaders' new behaviors aligned to the vision. These sessions enabled employees to make sense of the new

vision, in an environment clearly supported by the leaders; their commitment to the vision was clear. People understood where the vision came from, how others interpreted it, and what it meant to them individually.

The SLT also described how the goals and performance measures related to the vision. Employees asked how these new performance expectations aligned to and supported the new vision. They had the chance to make sense of the vision and gain clarity about the direction, relate it to their job, clearly see what was expected of them and their performance, and have the tools to achieve those performances.

Going forward, the vision was kept alive through continual reference in communications and in team meetings. The high engagement ultimately increased productivity and profitability.

### ***Making Your Vision Work***

Here are **10 rules** to follow in creating, sharing, and living your vision:

1. Create a vision you believe in and that excites *you*. If it doesn't excite you how can you excite others with it?
2. Consult as many people from different parts of the business as possible to ensure that everyone feels *connected* to the vision and *responsible* to achieve it.
3. Learn what motivates your people. Listen to what frustrates and excites them. Ensure the vision taps into these motivations for people to feel a connection to it.
4. Ensure there is clear alignment to KPIs, to performance management systems, and to all processes that will support the achievement of the vision.
5. Communicate the vision in a compelling way that leads people into the future, but is connected deeply with and values past and present successes.
6. Tell stories to bring the vision alive in a compelling and engaging way.
7. Ensure the vision is clear and simple. Use imagery to paint a picture of what the future will look like.
8. Give your people a chance to make sense of the vision and what it means to them so they can make it their own.
9. Live the vision; allow your passion for the vision to ooze out of you.
10. Align your behaviors with the vision; if you can't step up your performance, how can you expect others to?

Now you have the key elements at each stage of the visioning process to make your vision successful. **LE**

Tara Jones, Ph.D., is a Principal Consultant at Lane4 Management, a professional services firm in performance, leadership development and executive coaching. [www.lane4performance.com](http://www.lane4performance.com)

**ACTION: Put passion and meaning into your vision.**

**Leadership Excellence**