

Adapted from **ANTICIPATE: The Art of Leading by Looking Ahead, Chapter 1, The Groundwork** by **Rob-Jan de Jong** (AMACOM; January 8, 2015; \$27.95 Hardcover; 978-0-8144-4907-3).

Transformational Leadership

In 1977, Abraham Zaleznik of Harvard Business School threw a rock in the pond of management theory with his article "Managers and Leaders: Are They Different?" and invigorated a vivid debate among academics around the theme of leadership. The field hasn't been the same since. In his article, Zaleznik pointed out that management theory had missed half the picture thus far. The focus had been on rationality and control, with themes such as goals, organization structures, and resources. The view of the manager was that of a problem solver, succeeding through hard work, analytical abilities, and tough-mindedness. But "managerial leadership unfortunately does not necessarily ensure imagination, creativity, or ethical behavior in guiding the destinies of corporate enterprises," he pointed out.

He brought forward avant-garde themes such as inspiration, integrity, emotional commitment, drives, and motivation; themes we now commonly associate with leadership, and that seem so obvious once expressed. In realizing this kind of leadership, he underlined the importance of vision:

Where managers act to limit choices, leaders develop fresh approaches to long-standing problems and open issues to new options. To be effective, leaders must project their ideas onto images that excite people and only then develop choices that give those images substance.

That image is the vision. The four purposes of vision we just covered illustrate the key differences between leaders and managers once more. A manager's role is a very important one (let's not underestimate the inherent difficulties of being a good manager!), but it essentially boils down to keeping things on track. A leader's role is fundamentally different. It's about transformation, about motivating and inspiring people to move toward a new reality. Another eminent thinker we met before, John Kotter, continued the path broken open by Zaleznik. In his 1990 article "What Leaders Really Do," Kotter stated: "What leaders really do is prepare the organization for change and help them cope as they struggle through it." To achieve this organizational change, a leader must stretch the imagination, challenge the status quo, show a way forward, break through existing paradigms, energize and mobilize people to follow... In other words, a leader needs all the elements a vision brings.

So how does a vision connect with contemporary views on *leadership*? The concept of leadership is a dynamic one, trending through strategic leadership, situational leadership, authentic leadership, charismatic leadership, team leadership, servant leadership, and vigilant leadership, to name a few. But ever since Zaleznik and Kotter paved the way for seeing leadership in the light of pressing for change, most attention in the arena of leadership research goes toward *transformational leadership*, emphasizing intrinsic motivation, follower development, inspiration, and empowerment--all elements that are closely aligned with contemporary thinking about success in a turbulent, increasingly uncertain and complex world.

In his standard work *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, Peter Northouse, a professor at Western Michigan University, defines transformational leadership as:

[T]he process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower. This type of leadership is attentive to the needs and motives of followers and tries to help followers reach their fullest potential.

The concept of transformational leadership is very rich; it includes moral standards, role modeling, ethics, and other important concepts. But central to this view on leadership is the role of a compelling vision. According to Northouse:

The vision is a focal point for transformational leadership. It gives the leader and the organization a conceptual map for where the organization is headed; it gives meaning and clarifies the organization's identity. Furthermore, the vision gives followers a sense of identity within the organizations [and] the shared meanings that exist within them.

So again, as stated in the introduction, a vision is more than a nice-to-have. It's not something we should get to once we have the luxury to think about it. It's the cornerstone in contemporary thinking on leadership and a critical aspect for everyone aspiring to lead.