

Transformational Leadership

Becoming an Inspirational Leader

What Is Transformational Leadership?

Leadership expert James McGregor Burns introduced the concept of transformational leadership in his 1978 book, "Leadership." He defined transformational leadership as a process where "leaders and their followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation."

Bernard M. Bass later developed the concept of transformational leadership further. According his 1985 book, "Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations," this kind of leader:

Is a model of integrity and fairness.

- Sets clear goals.
- Has high expectations.
- Encourages others.
- Provides support and recognition.
- Stirs the emotions of people.
- Gets people to look beyond their self-interest.
- Inspires people to reach for the improbable.

More than 25 years after Bass' book, transformational leadership is often argued to be one of the most important ideas in business leadership.

How to Become a Transformational Leader

We've distilled Bass' ideas into a process that you can use to become a transformational leader. This involves you:

1. Creating an inspiring vision of the future.
2. Motivating people to buy into and deliver the vision.
3. Managing delivery of the vision.
4. Building ever-stronger, trust-based relationships with your people.

Use these steps, along with the tools we outline below, to develop your transformational leadership skills.

Step 1: Create an Inspiring Vision

People need a compelling reason to follow your lead, and this is why you need to create and communicate an inspiring vision of the future.

Your vision sets out your team or organization's purpose – why you all get up in the morning to do what you do. You develop this partly by understanding the values of the people you lead, partly by understanding the capabilities and resources of your organization, and partly by conducting an intelligent analysis of your environment, and selecting the best way forward within it.

This is the subject of business unit strategy, and developing a coherent strategy takes a lot of hard work and careful thought.

If you're developing a vision for your organization, use Mullins' Seven Domains Model to analyze your environment. Then, use tools such as Lafley and Martin's Five-Step Strategy Model to develop your strategy. This is usually then expressed in a business plan, and summarized in a mission statement.

If you're developing a vision for your team, start with the company's mission and vision, and explore the ways in which your team can contribute directly to it.

Step 2: Motivate People to Buy into and Deliver the Vision

Now, starting with your mission statement, you need to appeal to your people's values, and inspire them with where you're going to lead them, and why.

Use business storytelling as part of your call to action: this will help people appreciate the positive impact of your vision on the people you're trying to help. (Hint: if the only person you're trying to help is yourself, you won't inspire anyone.)

Then, talk about your vision often. Link it to people's goals and tasks to give it context, and help people see how they can contribute to it.

Transformational leaders also know that nothing significant happens unless they encourage their people. So, make sure that you know about the different kinds of motivation, and use these to inspire your people to deliver their best.

Step 3: Manage Delivery of the Vision

A vision is no use on its own: it needs to become reality. However, many leaders make the mistake of developing a vision, but of not putting in the hard and often mundane work of delivering it.

To manage the delivery of your vision, you'll need to combine effective project management with sensitive change management. This will help you deliver the changes you need with the full support of your people. Communicate each person's roles and responsibilities clearly and connect these to your plans. Everyone should fully understand what they're responsible for and know how you will measure their success. Next, set clear, SMART goals for everyone, including some short-term goals

that will help people achieve quick wins and stay motivated. Use management by objectives to link short-term achievement to your longer-term goals.

You may need to build your self-discipline and stamina, so that you don't let yourself down. And, set a good example to your people – especially if they're affected by delays or difficulties – by being a model of hard work and persistence.

Also, stay visible by practicing management by walking around. This is an ideal technique for transformational leaders because it helps you stay connected with daily activities and allows you to answer questions as they arise.

Step 4: Build Ever-Stronger, Trust-Based Relationships with Your People

As a transformational leader, you need to focus your attention on your people, and work hard to help them achieve their goals and dreams.

Use Dunham and Pierce's Leadership Process Model as your starting point. This tool outlines how important your people are to your success as a leader.

It also underlines the fact that leadership is a long-term process, and that, as a leader, you need to work constantly to build relationships, earn trust, and help your people grow as individuals.

Meet your people individually to understand their developmental needs, and help them to meet their career goals. What do they want to achieve in their role? Where do they see themselves five years from now? How can you help them reach this goal?

You can build trust with your people by being open and honest in your interactions. Use the Johari Window to disclose safe personal information about yourself, and to get a better understanding of "what makes your people tick."

Lastly, set aside time to coach your people. When you help them find their own solutions, you not only create a skilled team, but you also strengthen their self-confidence and their trust in you.