



THE WILKINS GROUP

# Tool Kit

Providing Tools for  
Productive Workplaces

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*“Success is to  
be measured  
not so much  
by the position  
that one has  
reached in life  
as by the  
obstacles  
which he has  
overcome.”*

*Booker T.  
Washington*

## Leading in times of uncertainty

**S**pring brings with it a sense of freshness and newness as flowers burst into bloom and daylight grows longer.

However, as we begin the second quarter of the year, the economy is still uncertain and the Middle East crisis is troubling. What does this mean for leaders who are formulating strategies for viability in these difficult times?

Leaders must go first to lead the way, even when the way is not clear. Leaders provide direction by developing a vision of the future and then enrolling their staffs in the vision so everyone becomes excited about



achieving it. When leaders provide a strong, clear vision and direction, they reduce people’s anxiety about the future and get their attention. Followers usually get behind a leader who provides clear direction.

This issue offers some tips on how leaders can develop an inspiring vision and provide clear direction for their organization.

I am pleased to introduce a new colleague, Carrie Beam, Ph.D., who presents information technology tips for leaders as they take their companies in new directions.

— Sheila Scanlon Wilkins

## How do we create an inspiring vision?

**W**hat is an inspiring vision? Most of us have seen visions posted on the wall that mean nothing and sound like management-speak. Visions are meaningless unless they live in the hearts and minds of people.

Visions are about the future — where the organization wants to be within a definable time period. A vision answers the question “how do we want people to perceive us?” In today’s rapid-fire environment, vision statements rarely exceed a two-year time span.

Visions give us stability and purpose. They provide the overarching framework to guide decisions, priorities and planning. A shared vision releases the energy needed to motivate the organization to action.

How do we capture the right words in a vision?

An inspiring vision statement consists of a few words — between 5 and 50, memorable and concise — enabling people to see clearly where the change will take them and why it matters. A few well-chosen words must accomplish a great deal. Each person’s mental image may be different, but each image needs to produce consistent meaning and encourage cohesive actions throughout the organization.

Here’s an example:

*“I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the Earth.”*

*John F. Kennedy, May 25, 1961*

People connected with this vision. It was pioneering and challenging. It took

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# Leaders must reap the benefits of the Information Age

By Carrie Beam, Ph.D.

**A**s leaders take their companies in new directions, it is extremely important that the leaders have complete, accurate information.

Often, the necessary information is available within the company, sitting in its computer system or spread out between departments, but somehow it never makes it to the desk of the leader in a timely fashion.

How can leaders ensure they are reaping the benefits of the Information Age?

**GATHER DATA**, using existing technology. If sales or marketing data is already in a database (Oracle, SAP, Access, or even Excel), it is a good start. Leaders can ensure the company runs weekly and monthly reports, and that somebody in management actually reads them.

**COMPILE INFORMATION**, by asking the right questions.

**Q:** "How much does Bob Smith typically buy?"

**A:** "Bob Smith is a medium-sized customer, and on average buys 1000 units per year."

**Q:** "Have you analyzed Bob Smith's profitability, compiled his purchases by quarter, and correlated them both with customer complaints across all divisions?"

**A:** "Bob Smith is more profitable than our average customer, and although he continues to purchase



large quantities, he purchases less and less each quarter. Moreover, he has lodged three complaints with us this year: one with sales, one with manufacturing, and one with our warranty unit. All of these complaints have

been open for more than 90 days, and none has been satisfied yet."

**CREATE KNOWLEDGE.** Consider investing in small-scale data mining. Data mining can answer questions such as:

☛ "What characteristics do our most profitable customers share with each other but not with everybody else?"

☛ How can we ensure our marketing efforts will gain us new customers which fit our "most profitable" customer profile?"

Large companies can spend millions of dollars on data mining; how-

ever, data mining on a smaller scale can give great insight at a very reasonable cost.

Investing in information technology is like buying a Porsche. The owner must take the car out of the driveway and onto the freeway to feel the difference. Similarly, to reap the benefits of the information age, it is not enough to buy a database and leave it "sitting in the driveway." If businesses gather data, compile information, and create knowledge regularly, they can take their profits out of the driveway and onto the highway.

☆ ☆ ☆

*Dr. Carrie Beam specializes in performance measures, benchmarking, quantitative "what-if" scenario support, and data analysis. She has been helping her clients uncover the story in their data and translate their databases into best practices and profits since 1995. She holds a Ph.D. in Engineering from the University of California at Berkeley, and a B.S.E. from Princeton University.*

## Create an inspiring vision

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people beyond what they thought they could do.

Creating a vision is much more than traditional, rational business planning. It involves both the left and right brain, rational and creative. It must be holistic in its view of the organization, focusing on business strategies, values and inner political dynamics.

Here's a Vision Statement Checklist to use when creating an inspiring vision:

- ✓ Links to clear business performance results.
- ✓ Focuses on a strategic gap.

*"Visions are meaningless unless they live in the hearts and minds of people."*

*Sheila Scanlon Wilkins*

- ✓ Builds a competitive advantage.
- ✓ Is relevant to shareholders, customers and the workforce.
- ✓ Gives

meaning to changes expected of people.

✓ Is exciting, believable and achievable.

✓ Is logical, consistent, and satisfies the intellect.

✓ Engages people at an emotional level.

Creating a vision is an evolving, future-oriented process. It is never done.

— *Sheila Scanlon Wilkins*



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