

NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP: CREATING SCENES THAT CHANGE THE FUTURE

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes — with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

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THE GOAL:

Ensure your next change initiative is a success by envisioning the behaviors needed to implement it.

NANOTOOL:

Leading successful change initiatives is an essential skill in today's "perpetual whitewater" business environment. Yet nine studies done between 1994 and 2010 report that 50 to 75 percent of all change initiatives fail. Behind such failures you'll often find a missing ingredient — one that may seem obvious in retrospect, but that many change leaders overlook — a clear, specific vision of the desired end-state.

What does success look like? And even more important, what are your people doing to create and sustain it? The odds of success decline if you don't have a clear picture. Imagine a team of rowers without a clear goal on the horizon. You can encourage them to row, and they may even row with vigor, but if they are confused about where they are heading their efforts will likely produce only exhaustion and disillusionment.

To avoid this trap, you can become a "script writer" for change. The scripting process is similar to writing a movie script. You describe a scene that clearly depicts the ideal future of your organization, including the specific behaviors of the people involved in the new scenario. This scene forms the blueprint for building the new work environment, and provides a map that can guide others in implementing the organizational change. The scripting approach has been used successfully for over two decades in a range of industries — from manufacturing to telecom, financial services to government. As you adapt it to your change initiative, there are two principles to bear in mind. First, your scene should be far enough into the future to decouple yourself from the major constraints of the moment. For executives, that usually means five to ten years; for managers, two to four years. Second, assume the world you desire has already arrived. Starting at a specific successful moment in the future and working back to the present produces more creative and more specific thinking than does starting with the present and trying to envision forward. Working backwards allows people to think, even dream, more freely and to make the as yet unrealized more concrete.



HOW COMPANIES USE IT:

- Disney uses storyboards to create scenes that depict the ideal customer experience and the behaviors necessary to achieve it. Each scene maps the customer experience from a guest's perspective and provides insights on how to improve processes and troubleshoot proposed changes. Scenes are scripted using a carefully selected vocabulary in which employees are "cast members," customers are "guests," and rides are "attractions."
- As the emergency room (ER) of a large U.S. hospital experienced rapid growth, the staff faced a complex challenge: how to more quickly evaluate and transfer critically ill patients to the intensive care unit (ICU). The problem involved cultural as well as capacity issues; those who work in the ER versus the ICU have very different processes for making decisions and communicating.

A multi-disciplinary team envisioned the goal of dramatically decreasing the time it took to move all critically ill patients to the ICU. "We see a team of people working together down in the ER, nurses from the ICU and from the Emergency Department working side by side. They are talking about a critically ill patient and discussing his care. They clearly know one another well and are working well together. A physician's assistant (PA) calls upstairs to make sure that a bed is available, and gives instructions about transferring another patient out who no longer needs intensive care. The process happens very quickly and calmly. As the patient leaves with the ICU clinicians, they turn back and say to their ER colleagues, 'Thanks, we'll be right back down to help with that patient in Core C.' And everyone smiles."

Once implemented, the change — involving cooperation between the ER and ICU staff — accomplished the original goal of dramatically cutting the time critically ill patients spent in the ER. It also vastly improved relations between clinicians.

ACTION STEPS:

The following steps, as illustrated in the two business examples described above, will help you and your team envision your desired future and identify the behaviors that define it.

Articulate the what, why, and who of the change. Boldly imagine your organization, and those who work in it, after you've achieved the change you want to create. Why is it important? If you can't state an end purpose in a simple sentence or two, then you're not ready to imagine what it could look like when it's achieved.

- 1. Become the screenwriter.** Imagine a scene involving key roles. Lay out all of the details as if they have already occurred and you are merely recording the actions. What does it look like? How are people acting? What has been accomplished? Who is contributing the most to the new outcome? Think ground level. Think work flow. Think actual, living, functioning reality. Formal titles and job descriptions do not matter as much as function and behavior do. Make the scene come alive by paying close attention to:

Person. Think about a particular person in a particular role in your organization. How will the change affect that person's day-to-day job or even just a set of activities? What will they actually be doing and saying?

Flow chart. Create a step-by-step chart that helps you tell the story of the imagined change. What happens first? What happens next? Who takes what actions? Who says what when?

Story. A well-told story connects us more deeply to human reality and experience. That connection gives stories emotional power that we can see and feel. Think of the scene as a story told from the perspective of one of the key players, and consider relating the story in the first person.

Props. If a key report or event doesn't currently exist, make it up. Mock up a sample of a report or dashboard, or fabricate a meeting agenda — the specificity serves to illustrate and to focus discussion.

2. **Repeat.** Focus on other key roles and do the same. Perhaps one scene involves a proactive middle management group fashioning the best approach to handling account receivables, another delineates an idealized performance review session for vice presidents, and still another describes a consideration of capital allocation or the desired approach to determining space needs.
3. **Stay with It.** Have you depicted the right 20 percent of the change? Enough to make you confident that with that 20 percent in place, then the other 80 percent will follow? If yes, then move on. If not, then develop the scenes further or construct new ones. Aim for critical mass, for enough key scenes to define the trajectory of the change and to clearly identify the new behaviors.
4. **Use the scenes diagnostically.** How should the work environment change to drive the scenes? Are the required changes consistent, even complementary? If so, then concentrate on identifying the necessary changes in the work environment. If not, then perhaps you have unearthed inconsistencies in your desired outcome that need addressing. Adjust the scenes or your vision accordingly.

SHARE YOUR BEST PRACTICES:

Do you have a best practice practice for driving organizational change? If so, please share it on our blog at Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management. <http://whartonleadership.wordpress.com/>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [*Leading Successful Change: 8 Keys to Making Change Work*](#), Gregory P. Shea and Cassie A. Solomon (Wharton Digital Press, 2013). Presents a thorough guide to making change work using a tested method developed over a combined 50 years of helping organizations achieve their change initiatives.
- [*Your Job Survival Guide: A Manual for Thriving in Change*](#), Gregory P. Shea and Robert Gunther (FT Press, 2009). Provides a mindset and the skills necessary to thrive in an environment of non-stop change. Topics include pacing yourself; failing gracefully and recovering quickly; retaining optimism, resilience, and playfulness; protecting your career; and setting your own course.
- Greg Shea teaches in Wharton Executive Education's [*High-Potential Leaders: Accelerating Your Impact*](#), [*The Leadership Journey: Creating and Developing Your Leadership*](#), and [*Leading Organizational Change*](#).

ABOUT NANO TOOLS:

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, Director of Innovative Learning Solutions at Wharton Executive Education. It is jointly sponsored by Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management, Wharton Professor of Management Michael Useem, Director. Nano Tools Academic Director, Professor Adam Grant.