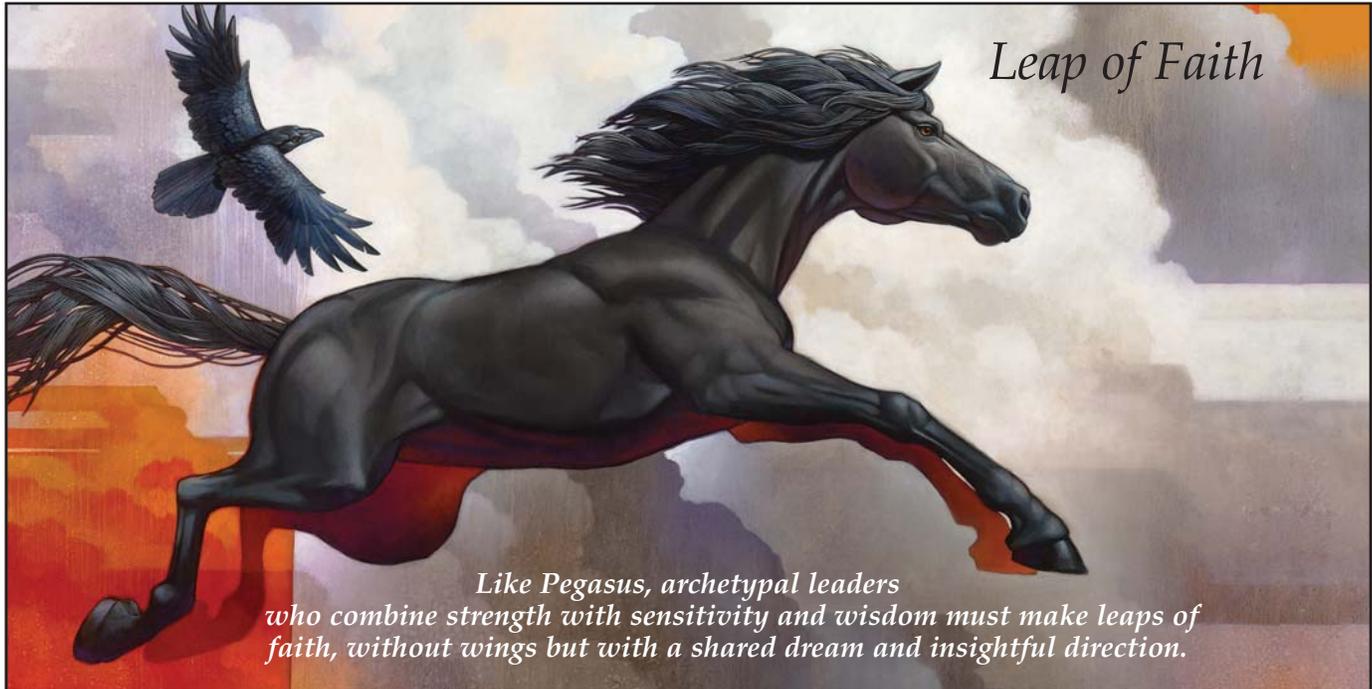


LEADERSHIP Excellence

Warren Bennis



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Leap of Faith

Like Pegasus, archetypal leaders who combine strength with sensitivity and wisdom must make leaps of faith, without wings but with a shared dream and insightful direction.

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Alignment

Transformational leadership.



by Bob and Gregg Vanourek

THE ARMY NEEDED A FIELD STOVE. Anxious to help, Sheldon Coleman contacted the general in charge of procurement for World War II. The general said they needed a stove that was small and light, weighing less than 33 pounds, able to burn fuels found on the battlefield, and operational from minus-60° to plus-125° F. Coleman engineers quickly drafted some rough designs they thought might work. Sheldon, overreaching, said they had a product. "Great," said the general. "We need 5,000 in 60 days." (Gulp.)

Coleman formed cross-functional teams, working around the clock and overlapping by thirty minutes to brief the incoming group. In 60 days, Coleman delivered 5,000 G.I. Pocket Stoves to the front lines, producing more than a million during the war.

The G.I. Pocket Stove became one of the most valued items for American soldiers, cooking meals, providing heat in foxholes, and boiling water to drink.

Facing daunting pressures, Coleman employees produced incredible results.

Authors Jim Collins and Jerry Porras wrote, "Building a visionary company requires 1 percent vision and 99 percent alignment." Yet most leaders don't know how to align a team or organization, leading to dysfunction. People work at cross-purposes, unclear about what to do and how they relate to other divisions and the strategy. Many get discouraged and cynical.

Alignment is one of five leadership practices that builds excellent, ethical, and enduring organizations. Alignment takes discipline, commitment, and follow-up. We created a powerful 10-step framework—*The Alignment Model*:

1. Purpose (or *Mission*) addresses why we exist. People hunger to know their efforts are significant. Purpose

statements should be short, memorable, and inspiring, like Disney's "Make people happy."

2. Values are norms that guide behavior, the standards for how people should behave. Everyone should know them and responsibly uphold them. Ideally, values are expressed as several stand-alone words with a memorable acronym. The values of MidCountry Financial Services are: *Compassion, Honesty, Integrity, Excellence, and Fairness* (CHIEF).

3. Vision provides a clear and inspiring word picture of what an organization aspires to achieve. Steve Jobs' vision for Apple was to "put a small ding in the universe" with *insanely great* products.

4. Goals are the few critical objectives sought by the whole enterprise, expressed as results: for example, achieve an X-percent market share by (date). The goals should be clear, measurable, prioritized, and challenging but achievable. It is useful to set one or two goals for each major stakeholder group.

5. Strategy involves the several prioritized, major initiatives on how to achieve the goals. In our view, everybody in the organization should receive a strategy summary (without revealing secrets). How can employees be aligned if they do not know the high-level plan to achieve the goals?

6. People specifies the types of people who should be involved in the enterprise: their desired knowledge and skills, their integrity, fit with the culture, and emotional intelligence.

7. Structure involves choosing the proper form for the enterprise, levels between first-line workers

and CEO, the spans of control leaders should have, and what the venture does internally versus contracting externally.

8. Processes involve necessary methods to guide the work, including standards and policies from evaluation methods for people to financial controls and board committee charters. Processes keep actions within critical boundaries.

9. Action plans are the major, short-term actions that must be done by each person to achieve non-routine tasks. They document who will do what by when. For example: "Mary will launch product X promotional campaign by Oct. 30."

10. Communication loops. Alignment requires tracking and discussing metrics regularly. Metrics should be clear and under the control or influence of the relevant person. Using these communi-

cation loops, leaders adjust until they find what works best. Leaders then connect these metrics to performance appraisals, incentives, discipline, and promotions, giving the process teeth.

How to Align an Organization

Many leaders only do parts of alignment, seldom all 10 steps. Or they do them top-down without collaboration. There is a big difference between completing an alignment exercise and creating an aligned organization, between having a purpose statement and being purpose-driven, between having values and upholding them under pressure.

- **Alignment must be collaborative.** Alignment requires extensive communication, with deep listening and dialogue. It's a back-and-forth, up, down, and sideways process that touches everyone, even some outside stakeholders. A coalition of enthusiastic volunteers can shepherd the process with support from top leaders. Alignment is a "we" (not "I") process. An autocratic leader won't tap into the creativity and commitment of people. A mandate to align will cause people to abdicate responsibility and withhold personal commitments.

- **Alignment takes time and patience,** waiting for ideas to simmer, feedback to percolate, and buy-in to develop. It can be messy and frustrating, requiring midcourse corrections. Alignment is an ongoing process—not a one-shot fix.

- **Alignment starts where the organization is.** Organizations in crisis must stop the bleeding now. If the organization is stable but needs new energy or to bring disparate elements together, then starting with purpose, values, and vision is logical, starting with top management, with drafts circulating for input. Use social media to facilitate conversation.

- **Alignment cascades.** Alignment must occur at multiple levels: enterprise, department, team, and individual. Each group can benefit from its own alignment effort, even with its own purpose, values, and vision, if they cohere with the enterprise-wide statements.

- **Alignment is a collaborative process with many benefits:** clarifying elements for success, focusing people, eliminating unessential work, building trust, providing feedback, motivating, fostering teamwork, instilling discipline, building commitment, and unleashing talent.

Aligned organizations can achieve astonishing results, with integrity, that stand the test of time. LE

Bob and Gregg Vanourek are coauthors of *Triple Crown Leadership: Building Excellent, Ethical, and Enduring Organizations* (McGraw-Hill). Visit triplecrownleadership.com.

ACTION: Align your organization.

