

# Men with Vision

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**Abstract-** This paper looks at a comparison be made between Eric Smith and a leader that we have had the opportunity of working with closely, explaining each man's and motivations for their respective visions. Additionally, each man's communication style is to be described, as well as, its' effectiveness with subordinates. Explain how each man's vision is purposeful, understandable, believable, and measureable. Finally, present the model of preference if asked to lead a district.

prepare students for the next level and/or for the world of work, or college. According to the article (voices.yahoo.com/eric-smith-pedro-garcia), Mr. Smith was hired by a school district in the State of Maryland to replicate the success he had in North Carolina. This candidate would like to believe that the district Mr. Smith takes the reins of is well aware of his track record and approach and is prepared to do that which most people do not like to do; change, even when it is for their own good.

## I. THE VISION OF ERIC SMITH

According to the documentary (PBS.org/makingschoolswork), Eric Smith was a Superintendent of schools in Charlotte, North Carolina in which his vision for student success was to make teachers responsible for student learning. His argument was that students were not challenged enough in the inner city (Urban) schools as their suburban counterparts. He argued that this was by design, having to do with teacher expectations of the students solely determinant upon race. Mr. Smith argued that teachers who did remain in urban schools where minorities were the majority of the student body were not up to the task of ridding themselves of their bias' to meet the challenge they signed up for, the business of teaching and would have to change in their attitudes if they were to remain employed, indicative of the *transformation leadership style*.

With the backing of the Governor, the business community, and frustrated parents, Mr. Smith, used the State of North Carolina's Supreme Court mandates and the data supplied by the state to enact change in what he calls the "business of education" and how it was conducted to correct the disparity in school performance of minority students relative to non-minority students. So, given the questions of the vision being purposeful and understandable, turning around minority student achievement to appease court mandates meets both concerns. It is understandable in that any tax paying citizen concerned about the value of services provided by their governmental bodies should be demanding that their money is being spent wisely. In the case of educating students, Mr. Smith's vision gives the taxpayer more bang for his/her buck because all involved in the spending of the taxpayer's dollar is being held accountable for results. Believability, Mr. Smith's vision is believable given that the Governor signed off on Mr. Smith's vision. Measureable, Mr. Smith's has data of prior student performance to use to compare to future student performance.

While the piece portrays Mr. Smith as being "controlling", it is evident that his confronting style with teachers was necessary in order for them to really see themselves and their issues as others do. In that regard, Mr. Smith spoke his mind without reservation stating what the data was manifesting. Egos aside, Mr. Smith's focus was that of an educator who understands the reason why teachers are employed, that is to

## II. THE VISION OF ARCHIE BLANSON

Mr. Blanson is the current school board superintendent in one of the Houston, TX area school districts. This candidate was volunteered to go through the district's leadership program to get a better understanding of how a school district functions given a budget as determined by the State of Texas Legislature. Mr. Blanson's vision is to make this urban school district one of the very best in the State of Texas regarding student performance, retention to graduation, and teacher retention which is indicative of the *participative leadership style*. Unlike Mr. Smith, Mr. Blanson, and other superintendents in urban areas of the State of Texas have been at odds with the current Governor and the Republican legislature regarding funding cuts for the past five years while having to continually serve more students. Notwithstanding, Mr. Blanson's team has bought into his vision and has been a catalyst for sharing their successes with other local area urban school districts within the Houston area.

The most unique aspect of the vision is that all of the administrators within the human resources department have, at minimum, been in the classroom; most of them having been principals and assistant principals. Having viewed the district's operations from budget discussions and how best to spend the money in educating their students to how each area of operation functions given their responsibilities within Mr. Blanson's vision, Mr. Blanson has received the cooperation of community partners from local area community colleges, colleges, and universities, to businesses and non-profits.

Mr. Blanson and his team have gotten everyone on board with his vision on making his district one of the best in the state, developing a training manual for the community partners (Leadership Aldine Presentation Manual, 2012). The purpose of the manual is for every participant to walk away from the program understanding the District's mission and how they as community partners can assist the District in achieving that mission. A member of Mr. Blanson's team made the statement that "if they have their hands on a student from kindergarten to high school graduation, their students will outperform other students on the next level."

The team member posits that the University of Houston has kept data on their students for the past twenty years that verifies that statement. Mr. Blanson and his team have utilized the data

for the district's drop-out rate and created a pre-school program for four year olds (three years for those children diagnosed with a disability). The District started with four pre schools and have expanded to eight. According to Mr. Blanson's team, the reasoning for the implementation of pre-schools was to increase the probability of students remaining in school until graduation. Mr. Blanson's team posits that data shows that having a student one extra year decreases the drop-out rate by thirty percent.

The last thing that caught this candidate's attention was the allegiances the district has made with colleges and universities that are out of state such as the University of Wisconsin and the University of Minnesota, where each university participates with the districts administration via training with their secondary teachers and the offering of full scholarships to students from the district, even paying for the students to travel to their perspective universities during the winter school sessions and summer.

Is Mr. Blanson's vision purposeful and understandable? Yes, Houston area drop-out rate is one of the highest in the state. Is Mr. Blanson's vision believable and measureable? Yes, other school districts in the area have adopted many of his team's strategies.

Just like Mr. Smith, Mr. Blanson attacked issues which data had been collected to expose glaring concerns in his district. Though each man's approach was different, they were/are able to get their subordinates to look at the data and buy into their respective visions which have resulted in a turnaround in their districts.

### III. MY PERSONAL MODEL

After reviewing the first article (Mr. Smith), and having had the opportunity of observing the results of Mr. Blanson and his team, having an approach to running a district for this candidate would be in line with the issues that district presents as shown by collected data. As with any successful administrator/leader/manager, data should always dictate the direction of your vision.

Given the opportunity to lead a district, this candidate would be more inclined to implement the model as posited by Mr. Blanson; participative leadership style. To be fair, and given the dynamics Mr. Smith was brought into and asked to correct, and the mindset of all concerned, this candidate could see the necessity for his action plan and leadership style (transactional). However, at some point, situational leadership appears to be a more cohesive, team building approach when subordinates understand the mission and that their input to the accomplishing of that mission is valued. Having had the privilege of Counseling people, as well as Managing (civilian) and leading (military) people, this candidate prefers the Situational approach to leadership. It is similar to counseling in that there is no one technique that fits all situations and circumstances. In this candidate's opinion, leadership is no different.

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