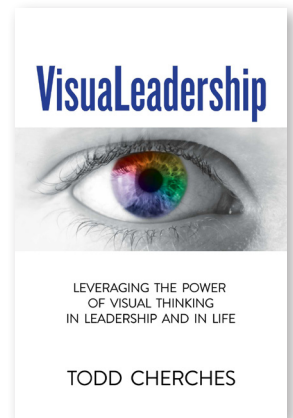


VisuaLeadership

Leveraging the Power of Visual Thinking
in Leadership and in Life

by **Todd Cherches**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Author Todd Cherches relies on a single phrase as the foundation to all of his thinking. Visual thinking and visual communication have the power “to communicate, to innovate, to manage, and to lead.”

When we communicate in this way, we increase the attention, comprehension, and retention we get from others. As a leader, you can leverage this by inviting and inspiring those you lead to see your picture of the future and follow you confidently into it.

In *VisuaLeadership*, Cherches teaches tools and techniques meant to “equip, enable, and empower” leaders to improve their efficiency and effectiveness, to maximize “performance, productivity, and potential,” and to “open your eyes to a world of new possibilities and new approaches” in becoming the visionary leader you need and desire to be.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Four ways to get people to see what you are saying as a leader.
- How models allow you to gain clarity, direction, and focus.
- How powerful the use of metaphors and stories are in leadership.
- Ten tough questions every self-aware leader needs to be able to answer.

What is VisuaLeadership?

VisuaLeadership exists at the point at which visuals and leadership intersect. It is the art and science of applying visual thinking and visual communication tools, tips, and techniques to manage and lead yourself and others.

Here is a formula that sums this idea up:

$$\text{VL} = (\text{VT} + \text{VC}) \times (\text{M} + \text{L})$$

VisuaLeadership =
(Visual Thinking + Visual Communication)
x
(Management + Leadership)

There are four ways to get people to see what you are saying as a leader. Each of them are employed for the purpose of conceptualizing and/or communicating.

Visual Imagery relies on things like videos, pictures, doodling, emoticons, shapes, logos, body language and more.

Mental Models use frameworks like tables, graphs, charts, diagrams, and matrices.

Metaphors compare things that are unlike one another and can be drawn from an endless array of possibilities including sports, art, nature, animals, and business.

Finally, **Visual Storytelling** harnesses the age-old power of storytelling with anecdotes, cautionary tales, drama, and comedy.

To provide clarity and solidify understanding of these ideas, here are a few questions that illustrate the use of visuals in real life:

Can you think of ways that use visuals such as maps, drawings, or photos to gather or learn new information or use those same visual tools to communicate your ideas, plans, or emotions?

Do you apply mental models or frameworks, like pro and con lists or flowcharts to “help frame your reality, innovate, make decisions, and solve problems?”

Metaphors and analogies are used ubiquitously to communicate with one another for the purpose of understanding or explaining new things. Can you think of a few?

What are some of your personal “go-to stories, anecdotes,

lessons, and examples” you pull out regularly to illustrate or make your point?

When you take the time to consider how frequently you already rely on visuals in daily life to understand and communicate, it is easy to see how they can be intentionally applied to enhance your effectiveness as a leader.

Visual thinking and communication enhance leadership effectiveness because we understand at a deeper level and recall what we have seen far more clearly when we have been presented with the information visually.

Leading with Visual Models

Visual models are frameworks that can be incorporated into your work as a leader, helping you make decisions, weigh factors, and gain consensus. Models help us take complex information and simplify it so that we can more easily understand it. They clean things up for us mentally, removing the messiness and complexity of a situation and place things within a framework. With a clearer understanding of the information being presented, we can make decisions that are informed and intelligent. Leaders can help others get their own minds around a new concept, plan, or challenge with the assistance of a visual model.

The different types of models a leader can use are limited only by the imagination. The following are just a few of the 18 models that can be used to be more effective as a manager or leader as well as to boost productivity.

ABC Decision-Making Tool

One of the preferred models is designed for decision making. There is no such thing as a perfect decision. Decisions cannot ever be absolutely right or wrong. Rather, we can take the information that we have available to us and make the best decision possible. But that is sometimes easier said than done.

When faced with a decision as a leader, the “ABC Decision-Making Tool” can help. This model breaks the decision-making process into clear, visually-displayed chunks, organized and considered in three parts.

Issue: The first part requires you to describe the problem or issue you are facing.

Options: The second part asks you to narrow your options down to just three viable solutions to the problem.

Decision: The decision is made in part three based on

CAP is about having the confidence, the assertiveness, and the presence to speak up and to speak out.

your understanding of the situation and your interpretations of the factors involved.

Put Your CAP On

Another recommended model is all about assessing your confidence, assertiveness, and presence and is called, “Put Your CAP On.”

The main difference between those who succeed and those who don’t can be summed up in those three words: **confidence**, **assertiveness**, and **presence**. Confidence is the degree to which you believe in yourself, Assertiveness is your ability to express yourself, and Presence is how you are viewed in the eyes of others.

At the core, CAP is about having the confidence, the assertiveness, and the presence to speak up and to speak out. To try new things. To take chances and risks. To fall and to fail. To fail and to learn. To seize opportunities and to act before the window of opportunity slams shut on your fingers.

The Passion/Skill Matrix

If you love doing something, even if you’re not very good at it, you’re going to spend time doing it in the hope of getting better at it or because it is fun. Similarly, if you’re good at something but don’t love doing it, you don’t really *mind* doing it. What about something you love doing *and* you’re good at? Now you’ve hit the magic bullseye: your passions and your skills are in alignment.

In almost every job, there are going to be aspects of your role that you enjoy doing and those that you don’t. There are things that you are good (or even great) at, and things that you are not. The key to success lies in finding a position that strikes the right balance.

That’s where looking at yourself through the lens of the Passion/Skill Matrix models comes in handy. By breaking all of your job-related tasks into the categories of good at, not good at, like doing, or don’t like doing, you can identify your:

- Sweet Spot: things you like *and* are good at doing
- Growth Zone: things you like but aren’t good at *yet*

- Default Zone: things you don’t like but are good at
- Failure Zone: things you don’t like *and* are not good at

If you sit down and reflect on your current role in this way, you can dramatically enhance your potential for success.

Power Dial

One of the reasons we hesitate, procrastinate, or fail to take action is because we feel as if we lack power. When out of work, stuck in a dead end job, or struggling with getting others to buy in to our ideas can make it seem like we have no leverage at all. But you have more power than you think!

Power can be described as the ability or potential to allocate resources, make and enforce decisions, and/or impact and influence others. You can turn up your potential power into performance to maximize your productivity and produce results.

Your power comes from three sources:

Personal: who you are, what you know, what you can do

Relational: who you know and who knows you, and

Positional: your role, status, or position.

Each of these sources can be leveraged, developed, and grown to boost your confidence and increase your influence.

Leading with Visual Metaphors

Whether you are conscious of it or not, you encounter countless uses of metaphor in your daily life each and every day. News programs, blog articles, books, social media posts, conversations, and more are peppered with them, and for very good reason.

What Are Metaphors?

Metaphors are simply figures of speech in which we use one thing that is usually completely unrelated to the topic at hand to explain something else. When we say something was “ice cold” or “on fire” we are using the words ice and fire to convey an idea that doesn’t actually have anything

to do with ice or fire itself, but you immediately understand what the meaning the message is delivering. In this way, metaphors are an extremely effective and memorable way of communicating a central idea.

The metaphors we encounter far and wide in real life show us what a powerful tool they can be in communication.

The Power of Metaphors Made Clear

This paragraph, for example, shows how prevalent and effective metaphors really are:

If I were to tell you that this book covering visual thinking and visual communication is *rooted* in the idea that thinking in pictures will help you to be a more effective leader, that I wanted to *plant this seed* in your mind by providing you with numerous examples as illustration, and that if you *branched out* into this area, I would be willing to *go out on a limb* and bet that if you start incorporating visual imagery, models, metaphors, and stories into your repertoire it will immediately *bear fruit*...I think the power of metaphor, in leadership and in life, even if you have never really thought about it before, will become immediately apparent.

The metaphors used in the previous statement, and those that we encounter far and wide in real life, show us what a powerful tool they can be in communication. Metaphors can:

- serve to make the unfamiliar familiar
- the intangible tangible
- the abstract concrete
- the complex simple
- the confusing clear
- and the invisible visible

You do have to be careful, however, that your use of meta-

phor doesn't cause confusion instead of clearing it up.

You shouldn't, for example, throw out the metaphor of sounding like a broken record to a group of college students who have likely never heard a vinyl record at all, and would, therefore, most likely not be able to relate to what a broken one might sound like. In that case, your message will get lost in translation, so to speak.

No matter what topic, anytime we are receiving new information we rely on our existing understanding of similar topics or our experiences to make sense of the new ideas. We line it up relative to what we already know and understand, as well as where and how this new information fits into our already-established mental map.

Metaphors can bridge the gap between present understanding and future work and challenges. Leaders who leverage the power of metaphor will find that those who they lead will be better equipped to rise to the challenges in your workplace now and well into the future.

Metaphor-Based Practices

Here are just a couple of the 14 metaphor-based practices that can help you lead more visually:

Elephant in the Room

One metaphor-based practice is related to confronting the "elephant in the room" anytime your team or a group you are leading is distracted or disengaged because of something unrelated to the topic at hand or that came on suddenly and carried a shock factor.

Take the example of a group that was hired to deliver a management training series. Shortly before the six-part series was set to begin, the managers who were going to attend learned that their company was being sold.

Obviously this weighed heavily on their minds. Many of them were unsure if they would even be employed by the company following the acquisition, which understandably distracted them from the training session in front of them. The acquisition was the "elephant in the room."

When you encounter a big elephant in the room, resist the temptation to ignore it as if it will go away on its own. Instead, put the spotlight right on it and work together to decide what should be done about it.

Making the Bed

People generally fall into one of two camps. There are

When we tell stories, we share a piece of who we are, what we think and feel, and what's important to us.

those that make the bed every single day without fail and those that don't see the point. After all, you're just going to crawl back into it and mess it up at night, right?

The problem with this daily struggle is that the dread, avoidance, and distraction of not making the bed takes up real space in your mind. It needlessly adds to the mental toll you are holding in your mind, negatively impacting your energy levels, enthusiasm, and focus.

The solution is clear. Just get up and make the bed. And no, we are not just talking about actual sheets and blankets. Whatever metaphorical beds you are leaving unmade, take care of them and make space for more important activities and pursuits.

Black Sock Decision Making

Instead of spending valuable time and energy every single day deciding what color or pattern socks to wear, wouldn't it be simpler to only have black socks in the drawer?

The more decisions in your life that can be standardized, systematized, automated, or eliminated, to the point that you don't even need to think about them anymore, the more free your time—and your mind—will be to focus on things at work, and in life, that truly matter.

Think about areas in your life where you can apply Black Sock Decision Making to achieve better results.

The Little Pink Spoon

A great pleasure in life is to walk into an ice cream store where they will allow you to taste a few flavors with a little pink spoon before ordering your cone. Why are they willing to give away their product for free? Because they hope that by giving us a free taste, we'll end up buying more in return. You can apply this to your life, too.

As you prepare for your next interview, client meeting, sales pitch, or presentation, think about how you might give people “a little pink spoon-sized taste” of who you are and what you have to offer. And, if all goes well, they'll want all of you...with a cherry on top.

Yellow Ball Leadership

When thrown three different colored balls, a dog always brought back the yellow ball...regardless of which color she was asked to fetch. Why? Simply because she wanted to! Similarly, people tend to gravitate towards the tasks that most interest and motivate them.

The first-ever management consultant Frederick W. Taylor wrote in 1911, “People do best what they like best to do.” And, apparently, that applies to dogs as well. So, for leaders, finding out what motivates your people will help you to set them up for success. And whatever that “yellow ball” is for you...go out there and get it!

Your Leadership Weather Report

What's your leadership weather report today? When you walk into a room, are you a cloud of doom or a burst of sunshine? Are you threatening or encouraging?

Your mood, attitude, and energy are contagious. From a leadership perspective, it's important to be consciously aware of how your disposition can impact others in both positive and negative ways.

Leading with Visual Stories

All human beings respond naturally to storytelling. We are absolute naturals at telling stories, too. This is true even when we perceive ourselves as not being very good storytellers at all.

Everyone Can Tell a Good Story

Here is just one of the 19 powerful examples from a workshop on the use of storytelling in leadership. One of the participants told the group that he really hated storytelling because he was “a terrible storyteller.” When prompted why he felt that way, he went on to tell this terrific story about why he thought he was so bad at it. Everyone can tell a good story...even when they think they are terrible at it.

When we tell stories, we share a piece of who we are, what we think and feel, and what's important to us. And through

the power of story, we can teach, we can change people's point of view, and we can even change the world.

From the perspective of your work as a leader, the key is to find ways to use stories purposefully and strategically. Your goal is to leverage storytelling to educate people, engage them so that they continue listening, and to excite them so they will be inspired to act. Visual storytelling is all about painting a picture with words during which you are taking someone on a journey and sharing an experience in such a way that they are able to see it in their mind's eye.

Stories can be classified into a number of categories, each with its own distinct purpose. The "Cautionary Tale" is meant to dissuade your team from letting something happen to them in the way it happened to you. Similarly, the "Personal Failure Story" is shared so that you as a leader can reveal a major mistake you made so that those you lead can avoid it for themselves. And, in so doing, your willingness to share your story and demonstrate your vulnerability will result in your being seen as a more human, empathetic, and relatable leader.

Stories are a pathway to share the wisdom of your experience with others. No matter what type of story you tell, when leaders are willing to share any kind of story openly, authentically, and with vulnerability, they are able to create a climate of psychological safety. This leads to a culture of openness, collaboration, and trust and that is advantageous for everyone you lead and the organization. The lessons learned from the openly-shared stories benefit all.

Leading with Visuals: What Now, What Next

The future is never completely known or certain but savvy leaders can better equip themselves for "The Road Ahead" with visual thinking and communication. This is especially important now, perhaps more so than ever. We are living in a world that is ultra-fast-paced, full of information overload and distraction, that leads to ever-shortening attention spans.

You can leverage the power of visuals to cut through the clutter so as to capture people's attention, enhance their comprehension, and increase retention. The competencies and abilities demanded upon today's workforce are ever evolving. VisuaLeadership can strengthen your capabilities and impact as a leader, better preparing yourself and those you lead for the future.

One way to assess your future readiness in this regard is to contemplate a series of questions. This set of questions is targeted at assessing, and if necessary, improving your self-awareness which is foundational to your success as a leader.

VisuaLeadership
can strengthen your
capabilities and impact
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Ten Tough Questions Every Self-Aware Leader Needs to be Able to Answer

Question 1: How do you personally define leadership?

Leadership is not a title. Rather, it is about stepping up to leadership when leadership is needed. It comes in many forms. What is yours?

Question 2: Who are some of the leaders that you admire, and why?

By looking at the qualities and characteristics of leaders that you hold in high regard, you can shape your own.

Question 3: Who have been some of the influential people in your own life from whom you have learned something valuable about leadership?

The answer will help you get specific about your own values, leadership style, and ethics.

Question 4: What have been some of the defining leadership moments in your life?

These are moments that you would consider game changers that moved or inspired you in a profound way. They have shaped the person and leader you have become and serve as a guidepost.

Question 5: What are you truly passionate about?

These are the things that excite you out of bed every morning or keep your mind contemplating at night. They energize

you and give you purpose. Figuring out what lights a fire inside you will help you do the same in those that you lead.

Question 6: Why should anyone be led by you?

This is a scary one and more than a little challenging to face. You can get to the heart of the answer by considering what would happen if you left your current position. Would people eagerly leave to follow you or would they be glad that you were going?

Question 7: What are some of the key leadership lessons you would want to pass along to others?

Part of your responsibility as a leader is to foster leadership skills and traits in others. Pondering what you want people to say about you at your retirement party will hone in on these lessons.

Question 8: Who are the people in your life right now who make you a better person and a better leader?

Think about the people in your life that you can count on to be open and honest and candid and truthful with you, with no other agenda other than wanting to help you be the best person and the best leader you can be. You will need to rely on them throughout your leadership journey.

Question 9: What are you reading, listening to, and watching?

The information you expose yourself to can have incredible impacts on how you lead yourself and others. Never stop seeking out new sources.

Question 10: Are you a good follower?

Effective leaders sometimes have to follow someone else's lead. Who do you follow and are you good at it?

Conclusion

No matter where you are on the journey of leadership, this collection of frameworks, metaphor practices, and storytelling is now a part of your VisuaLeadership tool kit. If you are intentional about implementing them and looking at your work as a leader through a visual lens, you will be better able to get your ideas out of your head and into the heads of others and change the world by turning your visions into realities.



Todd Cherches is the CEO and cofounder of BigBlueGumball LLC, an innovative New York City-based management and leadership consulting, training, and executive coaching firm. BigBlueGumball's patented VisuaLeadership® methodology leverages the power of visual thinking and visual communication to equip, enable, and empower business professionals of all levels to maximize their performance, their productivity, and their potential. A three-time award-winning Adjunct Professor of leadership at NYU and Lecturer on leadership at Columbia University, Todd is also a TEDx speaker, a member of Marshall Goldsmith's "MG 100 Coaches," and was one of eight global finalists for the Thinkers50 "Distinguished Achievement Award" in Leadership (2021).

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