



# How to Become a

Dealers who have a clear, bold vision for the future must be willing to take risks and able to get managers, employees, and key stakeholders on board.

➤ *By Mike Esposito*

**The late Steve Jobs, cofounder and visionary leader of Apple, helped launch the era of the personal computer.**

**Connected cars, self-driving cars, online car-buying portals, virtual-reality test drives, cars that can diagnose their own maintenance needs — all these changes and more are coming down the pipeline.** You and your dealership need to be prepared. If you resist these changes until the last minute, it may be too late to adapt.

One thing's for sure: Visionaries are changing the auto industry. When I say "visionaries," you know the type of leader I mean: Jeff Bezos with Amazon, Steve Jobs with Apple, and Elon Musk with SpaceX and Tesla. These men aren't just the leaders of their respective companies. They are visionaries who have transformed entire industries.

A visionary's success stems not from finding a better way to do something, but creating an entirely new way of doing something. The sea changes they create are swift and strong. As dealers and vendors in the auto industry, we can all try to swim against the current, but, ultimately, the tide will overcome. At that point, we have but one choice: Adapt or die.

As leaders, how do we adapt our businesses to thrive in a visionary's vision of the auto industry? The best way is to become a visionary yourself. If you begin to think, feel and act like a visionary, you will be prepared for the coming changes, rather than have to respond in a frantic attempt to keep up. If you are ready, here are a few pointers.

## 1. Create a Vision.

Visionaries ask big questions and create their vision from the answer. Elon Musk asked, "Why aren't we going to Mars?" Steve Jobs asked, "Why can't everyone have their own personal computer?"

To create a vision for your dealership, you have to ask big questions. What will the auto industry look like five years from now? What will your dealership look like in a world with self-driving cars? How will you stay competitive? Where will most of your revenue come from?

Turning a bold vision into reality can take years, so it's important to ask these questions now.

## 2. Identify Your Customers' Aggravations.

The most successful visionaries find unique ways to solve their customers' problems. IKEA's method of selling partially assembled furniture was not conceived as a bold innovation. It was an observation that employees made when they removed the legs from a table so it could fit it into a customer's car. "Why should we put the legs on the table in the first place?" they asked. The obvious answer was that they shouldn't.

Visionaries are great observers. As a leader, you must try to understand what your customers' frustrations are. Identify the processes that make the car-buying process faster. Identify the processes that make the service experience better. What problem does your customer have that they don't even know about? Identify it and solve it. You will create a need and a service that will vault you from mere leadership into visionary territory.

## 3. Be Willing to Take Risks.

Google cofounder Larry Page is one visionary who is known for taking risks. As a college student, he proposed hacking the Palm Pilot to make it do something it wasn't supposed to do. His senior adviser told Page it couldn't be done and encouraged him to choose a different project. Page agreed that he didn't know if

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it could be done, but he tried it anyway. Guess what? Page did it and got an A+.

If you want to change the way you do business, you're going to get a lot of pushback — especially if you have no idea whether an idea will work or not. But if you believe strongly in something, do it anyway.

Your idea may fail. You may get the “I told you so.” Don't let that deter you. Modify your idea and try again until you find something that succeeds. Visionaries take risks, are willing to fail, and never give up.

## 4. Be Openminded and Curious.

Visionary leaders approach problems with openmindedness and curiosity. They are not locked into one solution. During World War II, when many conventional battle tactics failed, Winston Churchill was forced to view situations with a new perspective and try new ways of dealing with the enemy.

Every leader has moments of clarity, but they also have moments of opacity — when they don't know what to do in a situation, for example, or when something they thought was right turned out to be wrong. When this happens, visionaries reach out to others for new ideas and new perspective.

Successful visionaries also connect and communicate with large networks of people. Staying within a closed, small network of your family, long-time friends and local community, you are not likely to be exposed to a lot of new ideas. Read, explore and network with people in other industries to gain new perspective.

## 5. Get Other People to Share Your Vision.

Bold visions create hope. Visionary leaders communicate their vision to others in a way that gets them excited about it. This is a critical skill to develop if you want your vision to become a reality. No visionary succeeds alone. You need your employees and other stakeholders to get on board. We must put some thought and time into how we will influence others.

Steve Jobs did an incredible job at getting people excited about Apple products. His notorious secrecy generated buzz leading up to each new product launch. His demos were legendary. This was no accident. He spent an enormous amount of time planning each new launch and meticulously thought out every detail.



**Tesla CEO Elon Musk has won few friends among U.S. dealers, but his SpaceX venture is changing the way people think about space travel and planetary colonization.**

When Elon Musk had a vision for the Hyperloop, he shared his thoughts on the basics of how it would work. But he was already running two companies and didn't have time to work on specifics. So he launched a global competition for engineering students to create pods that will safely transport humans through a vacuum tube at 700 miles per hour.

If you have a bold vision for your dealership's future, share it with your managers and employees. Acknowledge you need their input. Let them help you develop the idea, identify flaws, and take ownership of it with you. Think about how you can create excitement around your ideas. Encourage competition.

Leadership is hard. Becoming a visionary is even more difficult. Leaders are often wrapped up with the everyday details of running a business. To be a visionary requires removing yourself from some of this so you have time to research, explore, observe, brainstorm and network. But the results of your efforts will be tangible. Visionaries define where their industry is going. They are more successful than their peers who resist change until the last minute. **ad**



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