

# The Vision Thing

Mike George looks into why vision is important  
and what kinds of vision are essential.

*Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation) there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans - that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too.*

*All sorts of things occur to help one that would not otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamt would come his way. Whatever you can do, or dream, begin it! Boldness has genius, magic and power in it. Begin It Now.*

Goethe



In a now famous study at Yale University final year students were asked a range of questions about their life. Within the study were two significant questions. The first was, "Do you have goals?", and around ten per cent said yes they did. The second question was "If you have goals, do you have them written down?", and around four per cent of the total said yes to this. Twenty years later the University decided to find out where all those questioned were in their lives. The search spanned the

world, and while some had died the vast majority were found and completed the follow-up questionnaire. It turned out that the four per cent who had written their goals 20 years before were streets ahead of the rest when the indicators of success were examined. They had achieved a more balanced life, their well-being and commitment to the community were 'outstandingly different' from the rest. And while financial worth is by no means a true measure of success, the 4 per cent were

worth more than the other 96 per cent together!

Perhaps the most interesting interpretation of this study is that when it is globally translated it appears that around 96 per cent of us will spend our lives helping the other 4 per cent achieve their goals!

What is a goal but a vision, an inner image of a preferred future state? That future could be seen in terms of external achievement - achievement by acquisition of status, power or wealth. Or it could be defined as inner achievement or the development of new skills, abilities, insights or behaviours. Or, depending on your personal values, it could be the letting go of those external acquisitions and internal beliefs and concepts which are seen to define a sense of imprisonment - the vision being one of freedom from any attachment. In all cases the same principles within the process of vision achievement apply - to the extent that the vision is clear in focus, rich in detail, and concentrated in time, so will the achievement or attainment happen with ease; or if not clear and concentrated, with struggle.

Visions or mental pictures are subject to the law of attraction. They are magnetic, drawing towards themselves the energies and circumstances which will make them manifest in reality as outer conditions or crystallised experience as an inner state of being. But real vision is not desire. Where there is desire, there is an attachment to a result or an outcome, and the fear implicit within the desire will dilute the clarity of vision and weaken action along the way.

*"Without vision the people perish"*, says the New Testament. Why? Because vision provides a sense of direction and meaning in life. A coherent vision is like an inner filter. In the context of Doing: if your vision is a picture of you winning a major tennis tournament in three years, and you are walking down the high street tomorrow and see a sign which says "Tennis Sale:

Equipment and Lessons Half-Price", then because you have the mental picture inside your head, this sign has meaning. No vision equals no meaning. Which is why many people wake up most days and ask: "What's the meaning of this life?". In the context of Being: the same principle applies at an internal level when you see or create the vision of your character in, say, a year's time. If it is one of patience, peacefulness and personal power then you will be alert to moments, situations and resources which may provide you with the knowledge and wisdom to create the necessary changes in your character and the opportunities to practise. Without a sense of personal vision, life can easily become directionless and meaningless; and as a consequence motivation, commitment and self-esteem deteriorate.

An effective vision is usually a composite of elements and is more caught than taught. Vision formation is internal, and it requires a sifting, a recognition, an ability to give priority and a synthesis of elements - some of which may be barely visible. Any focus or pattern emerges from a variety of kaleidoscopic sources - of human influences, of experiences, of reflections and of intuitions. Clarity of vision results from pattern recognition and selection, which is a process that requires both rational and emotional cues. Vision creation is a balanced process of allowing the elements to come together naturally (seeing or insight) and deliberately refining the details. However, attachment to the vision can be fatal in a rapidly changing world, so a continual process of reviewing and refining is healthy.

A vision can be a dream, a mission, a commitment, a forecast, a hunch, a precursor to a discovery or a new approach to achieving a particular outcome. Those lacking in vision are thought to be doomed. Their destiny is not within their control. They are fated to be controlled by the more imaginative in all walks of life.

Vision is the one quality that may be shared and valued by entrepreneurs, leaders, coaches, prophets, politicians, strategists, scientists and artists. It takes historical vision to know where we have been, situational vision to see where we are and strategic vision to work out the direction in which we should now be going.

It demands *leadership vision* to realise how to motivate people to change their ways, to strive to attain higher standards, to take greater risks, to support new ways of doing things, to reach new goals. It needs *organisational vision* to work out how people can best pool their resources and abilities so as to rise to a collective challenge. Visionary foresight enables leaders to identify important issues while there is still time to do something about them.

In an organisational context the key visionary skill is *systems vision*, the ability to appreciate and comprehend the systems in which one is playing a part, and which in turn are affecting the part that one can play, determining, as if by an unseen hand, what one can and cannot do - and creating the potential for what is going to be possible to do tomorrow.

Systems visions are the artistic visions of our era, the political visions of our age, and the dominant potential creative forces of the moment. Systems visions are like a new art form, they are always waiting to be discovered. They are the international currency of leadership.

Systems visions are the tools at the disposal of true leaders, giving them the edge to understand and explain today, and the power to create better tomorrows. But they are not created by single, solitary minds working without exposure to other stimuli. This is the responsibility of teams which can go under many names - policy units, think tanks, task forces, strategic planners, long range forecasters - but their purpose is the same - to anticipate, create and define

macro and micro dimensional futures for their organisations, or their nations.

To work they must practice vision *management*, a previously unrecognised skill. At a minimum this embraces a situation where vision can create:

- a context permitting, encouraging and rewarding visionary thinking exposure to vision-forming materials and examples,
- an aptitude for, experience at, or training in vision creation,
- an appreciation of systems thinking the creativity and imagination to envisage new futures,
- the ability to synthesise and integrate disparate strands,
- an appropriate attitude to and support for risk-taking,
- an organisational ability to restructure, regroup and refocus resources in response to logic of new systems vision,
- a capacity among existing leaders to have the confidence to allow new people to own and develop the new vision
- the flexibility to adapt the vision as events and circumstances unfold.

In a turbulent world, visions can induce stability and restore a semblance of order. However, those with powerful and inspirational visions need to take care. History shows us that a vision broadcast to ten or ten thousand can be a trigger to those who are threatened by vision-driven change, and their resistance can be fatal. JF Kennedy, Luther King and Gandhi are the most public examples. But daily vision resistance can be found more commonly across breakfast and boardroom tables. Which is why it is often best to create it, sustain it and keep quiet about it. And just enjoy watching it become a reality.

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