

Drawing Forth Personal Vision

Preparing to do the exercise

This exercise begins informally. You sit down and “make up” a few ideas about your aims, writing them on paper, in a notebook, or with a word processor. No one else need ever see them. There is no “proper” way to answer and no measurable way to win or lose. Playfulness, inventiveness, and spiritedness are all helpful--as if you could again take on the attitudes of the child you once were, who asked similar questions long ago.

Step 1: Creating a Result

Begin by bringing yourself to a reflective frame of mind. Take a few deep breaths, and let go of any tension as you exhale, so that you are relaxed, comfortable, and centered.

From there you may move right to the exercise; or you may prefer to ease in by recalling an image or memory meaningful to you. It could be a favorite spot in nature (real or imagined), an encounter with a valued person, the image of an animal, or an evocative memory of a significant event: any time where you felt something special was happening. Shut your eyes for a moment, and try to stay with that image. Then open your eyes and begin answering the following questions:

Imagine achieving a result in your life that you deeply desire. For example, imagine that you live where you most wish to live, or that you have the relationships you most wish to have. Ignore how “possible” or “impossible” this vision seems. Imagine yourself accepting, into your life, the full manifestation of this result. Describe in writing (or sketch) the experience you have imagined, using the present tense, as if it is happening now.

What does it look like?

What does it feel like?

What words would you use to describe it?

Step 2: Reflecting on the First Vision Component

Now pause to consider your answer to the first question. Did you articulate a vision that is close to what you actually want? There may be a variety of reasons why you found it hard to do:

- “I can’t have what I want.”
- “I want what someone else wants.”

- “It doesn’t matter what I want.”
- “I already know what I want.”
- “I’m afraid of what I want.”
- “I don’t know what I want.”

The response to that is to say, “Suppose you had a vision of greatness: what would it be?” A vision exists within each of us, even if we have not made it explicit or put it into words. Our reluctance to articulate our vision is a measure of our despair and a reluctance to take responsibility for our own lives, our own unit, and our own organization. A vision statement is an expression of hope, and if we have no hope it is hard to create a vision.

- “I know what I want, but I can’t have it at work.”

Step 3: Describing Your Personal Vision

Now answer these questions. Again, use the present tense, as if it is happening right now: If the categories do not quite fit your needs, feel free to adjust them. Continue until a complete picture of what you want is filled in on the pages.

Imagine achieving the results in your life that you deeply desire. What would they look like? What would they feel like? What words would you use to describe them?

Self-image: If you could be exactly the kind of person you wanted what would your qualities be?

Tangibles: What material things would you like to own?

Home: What is your ideal living environment?

Health: What is your desire for health, fitness, athletics, and anything to do with your body?

Relationships: What types of relationships would you like to have with friends, family, and others?

Work: What is your ideal professional or vocational situation?

Personal pursuits: What would you like to create in the arena of individual learning, travel, reading, or other activities?

Community: What is your vision for the community or society you live in?

Other: What else, in any other arena of your life, would you like to create?

Life purpose: Imagine that your life has a unique purpose--fulfilled through what you do, your interrelationships, and the way you live. Describe that purpose, as another reflection of your aspirations.

Step 4: Expanding and Clarifying Your Vision

If you're like most people, the choices you put down are a mixture of selfless and self-centered elements. People sometimes ask, "Is it all right to want to be covered in diamonds, or to own a luxury sports car?" Part of the purpose of this exercise is to suspend your judgment about what is "worth" desiring, and to ask instead: which aspect of these visions is closest to your deepest desires? To find out, you expand and clarify each dimension of your vision. In this step, go back through your list of components of your personal vision that you have written down: including elements of your self-image, tangibles, home, health, relationships, work, personal pursuits, community, life purpose, and anything else.

Ask yourself the following questions about each element before going on to the next one.

If I could have it now, would I take it?

Some elements of your vision don't make it past this question. Others pass the test conditionally: "Yes, I want it, but only if. . ." Others pass, and are clarified in the process.

People are sometimes imprecise about their desires, even to themselves. You may, for instance, have written that you would like to own a castle. But if someone actually gave you a castle, with its difficulties of upkeep and modernization, your life might change for the worse. After imagining yourself responsible for a castle, would you still take it? Or would you amend your desire: "I want a grand living space, with a sense of remoteness and security, while having all the modern conveniences."

Assume I have it now. What does that bring me?

This question catapults you into a richer image of your vision, so you can see its underlying implications more clearly. For example, maybe you wrote down that you want a sports car. Why do you want it? What would it allow you to create? "I want it," you might say, "for the sense of freedom." But why do you want the sense of freedom?

The point is not to denigrate your vision thus far--it's fine to want a sports car--but to expand it. If the sense of freedom is truly important to you, what else could produce it? And if the sense of freedom is important because something else lies under that, how could you understand that deeper motivation more clearly? You might discover you want other forms of freedom, like that which comes from having a healthy figure or physique. And why, in turn would you want a well-toned body? To make love for hours every night? To play tennis better? Or just because. . .you want it for its own sake? All those reasons are valid, if they're *your* reasons.

Divining all the aspects of the vision takes time. It feels a bit like peeling back the layers of an onion, except that every layer remains valuable. You may never discard your desire to have a sports car, but keep trying to expand your understanding of what is important to you. At each layer, you ask, once again: If I could have it, would I take it? If I had it, what would it bring me?

This dialogue shows how someone handled this part of the exercise:

My goal, right now, is to boost my income.

What would that bring you?

I could buy a house in North Carolina.

And what would that bring you?

For one thing, it would bring me closer to my sister. She lives near Charlotte.

And what would that bring you?

A sense of home and connection.

Did you put down on your list that you wanted to have more of a sense of home and connection:

[Laughs] No, I didn't. I just now realized what is really behind my other desires.

And what would a sense of home and connection bring you?

A sense of satisfaction and fulfillment.

And what would that bring you?

I guess there's nothing else--I just want that. [Pause] I still do want a closer relationship with my sister. And the house. And, for that matter, the income. But the sense of fulfillment seems to be the source of what I'm striving for.

You may find that many components of your vision lead you to the same three or four primary goals. Each person has his own set of primary goals, sometimes buried so deeply that it's not uncommon to see people brought to tears when they become aware of them. To keep asking the question, "What would it bring me?" immerses you in a gently insistent structure that forces you to take the time to see what you deeply want.

Charlotte Roberts, Bryan Smith, Rick Ross, from *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* (Doubleday, 1994)