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## Learning Organizations Part 5: Shared Vision and Your Personal Vision

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"The greatest leaders and statesmen in history have not been problem solvers. They have been builders. They have been creators. Even in times of great conflict, such as war and depression, they have taken action to bring into being the society they envisioned."

— Robert Fritz, **The Path of Least Resistance** (1984, 1989)

I have the opportunity to consult with, and to work in, many organizations in both the public and the private sector. As a result, I hear about many of the strategies that organizations are using to manage the turmoil of change. I notice that there are strategies at all levels of the organization, from the front-line

worker to senior management. Although the strategies are different, one thing is clear: everyone is looking for an *answer* to what is perceived to be the *problem*. I believe that this provides an opportunity to move *beyond* the problem. The third discipline of learning organizations, **Shared Vision**, gives us a clue for taking advantage of this opportunity **to create our future**.

Creating a vision is not a new idea. Organizations have been developing visions for years. Many organizations mount and frame their visions, and hang them on walls throughout their buildings. In most cases, senior management develops the vision for the company. It is assumed that once senior management articulates the vision, the people in the organization will buy into and follow this vision. In reality, this seldom happens. Unless

people within the organization can see how their personal visions fit into the corporate vision, they are not able to buy into a corporate vision. The vision remains simply a piece of paper on the wall.

Few organizations truly understand what is meant by a *shared vision*. Peter Senge states that "... at the heart of building shared vision is the task of designing and evolving ongoing processes in which people at every level of the organization, in every role, can speak from the heart about what really matters to them and be heard — by senior management and each other." How many organizations have you encountered in which people can truly speak from the heart? For that matter, how many relationships with other people have you found in which you can speak from your heart? Shared vision is hard to build, and it doesn't start and end at the top of the organization. It starts with you — the

individual — and your personal vision of “what you want to create for yourself and the world around you” (Senge, **The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook**, p. 201). Each person within the organization needs to be clear about what he or she wants to create. Then each person can see how he or she fits into the corporate vision.

The power of a vision is in identifying your current concerns and problems, and recognizing that you cannot solve them from your current reality. You need to go beyond what you can see in the present. You need to create the future that you want. A vision lets you create such a future. Robert Fritz, author of **The Path of Least Resistance**, believes that you can do this only by changing your view of the world from one of *problem solving* to one of *creating*. Fritz states, “When we think of [situations] as problems, we try to solve them. When you are solving a problem, you are taking action to have something go away: *the problem*. When you are creating, you are taking action to have something come into being: *the creation*.”

Fritz offers **five common steps** in the creative process (Fritz, pages 51-55). These are guidelines for creating your desired future. You can also use these guidelines to develop shared visions within teams, units, departments, and the organization as a whole. However, the best place to start is at the level of the individual.

**1. Conceive the result you want to create.**

If you could have exactly the result you want, what would that result look like? Write this in the present tense, as if you already have it.

**2. Know what currently exists.**

Look closely at what currently exists in your situation. What does the situation look like? How are you and other people behaving in this situation? How long has this situation persisted? What have you and other people done to change the situation, and what has happened? **Be careful** not to spend too much time on this. It can be easy to talk yourself out of taking any action.

**3. Take action.**

Because you now know what you want to create, opportunities begin to present themselves. Take advantage of these opportunities. Take action. One caution that Fritz states is that “some of the actions you take will help you move directly to the result you want, *but most will not*. The art of creating is often found in your ability to adjust or correct what you have done so far.” Be prepared to take many actions to reach your desired result. Be prepared to learn from your actions and to adjust your next action, based on what you have learned. Always keep a clear picture of the result that you want to create, and don’t give up.

**4. Learn the rhythms of the creative process.**

At first you’ll be excited. Then you’ll notice that *the thrill is*

*gone*. This is when you need to focus on your result, and take action towards that result. Eventually, you will have created your desired result.

**5. Create momentum.**

Don’t stop now. You get better at creating only by continuing to create. The more you create your desired results, the easier it becomes to create the next result. Fritz uses Mozart as an example of creating momentum. “The more music he wrote, the more he was able to write.”

Every day, I meet people who feel stressed by the enormous amounts of change going on around them. When I ask them what they want, they can tell me only what they *don’t want*. I believe that most of their stress comes from not knowing what they *do* want. One of the best ways to relieve that stress *is* to be clear about what you want in your future. The only way I know to get this clarity is to spend some time with yourself, thinking about the kind of future that you do want.

**Further Reading:**

Peter Senge has a wonderful step-by-step process on *Drawing Forth Personal Vision*, in **The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook**, on pages 201-206.

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