

Vision: Designing the Future You're Meant to Have

by Phil Glosserman

As a business and personal coach, I help individuals and companies move to the next level of success, whatever that may be for them. For some, it means enhancing their productivity and performance, for others it means redefining and executing business or career objectives. In all cases, I start by having my clients explicitly define what they want to have in place in the future—their vision. Once they're clear about their vision, I support them in planning, executing, and staying on-track and motivated—whatever it takes to turn their vision into reality.

This article discusses some of the major components of vision. Portions are excerpted from the upcoming book, Vision: The Art of Creating a Magnificent Future, which I've co-authored with my fellow coaches, Larry Pinci and Lisa McCullough.

Do you have an inspiring vision for your future?

Vision is a term that's bandied about quite a bit these days. It's been trivialized, hyped, and marketed so much, that for many people it's just another buzzword. For some, vision has a lofty connotation—they think it's the exclusive province of geniuses and people with exceptional foresight. Others think it's high-minded nonsense that has nothing to do with real life or real people. Still others think they have so much on their plate in the present that they don't have time to formulate, much less work toward, a vision for their future.

What Is Vision?

A *vision* is a mental picture or description of what you want to accomplish or have in the future. Vision is the “big picture”—it's an outcome that will result from intelligent planning and work; it includes how you want to impact not only yourself, but others as well. A vision doesn't have to be earth shattering or revolutionary, but it *is* something that's important to you and that you're passionate about. President Kennedy's vision of putting a man on the moon by the end of the 60s is an example of a vision; so is a description of your ideal job, your dream house, or anything meaningful you want to create or put in place in the future.

As humans, having a vision is our birthright. We have the amazing ability to formulate a vision and plan and carry out the steps to turn it into reality. Everyone has this power, but very few understand how to use it fully and effectively. There are certain key skills requisite to

unlocking the power of vision and these skills can be learned, but unfortunately they are rarely taught.

Why Have a Vision?

When I talk about having a vision, many people tell me they prefer to take a more relaxed and easygoing approach, living day to day, taking things as they come. This “go-with-the-flow” philosophy seems quite inviting—why go to the trouble to have a vision? Here's why:

- Vision is the starting point for any important venture. Without a vision, you'll be apt to live according to short-term circumstances and the wishes or demands of others. As the saying goes, “If you don't know where you're going, you'll surely get there.”
- Vision infuses you with energy, passion, and resourcefulness. It can propel you to accomplish great things.
- Vision helps you find meaning and direction in your life. It gives you a sense of duty and destiny and helps you determine what to focus on and what actions to take.
- Vision helps you see the bigger purpose of your daily activities.
- Vision can inspire and empower you to push through and beyond difficult times and obstacles.

Harnessing the Power of Vision

For many people, there's something profound and even magical about having a vision. When they discover what they really want to work toward, it feels as if they've connected with their true calling, path, or destiny. They have an intuitive sense that they're being called to the future they're *meant* to have. When people start working toward accomplishing their vision, doors seem to open, they connect with the right people, and serendipity occurs. It's as if their vision is a magnet attracting the resources they need. There is power in vision.

Many of my coaching clients are people who want to make a career shift or change. One of my clients, Dave, suffered job dissatisfaction for over six years. He was a copywriter for a direct-mail marketing company. He considered it a “pretty good” job, and believed it was the best he could do. He had risen steadily in the ranks, and was making over \$65,000 a year (a figure that had at one time been beyond his wildest dreams). He was supporting his family,

paying his mortgage, and everything his life was humming along at a steady, predictable pace.

So why was Dave unhappy with his job? Well, he wasn't entirely unhappy. He liked the *trappings* of his job: the money, the status of the position, and the industry. However, he wasn't enthusiastic about writing ads, and felt there was something important missing in his career. He secretly longed for work that would engage his interests and passions and would inspire him to evolve beyond his current limited view of himself and his future. He dreamed of someday working in the technology field, but had no idea what exactly he wanted to do, much less how to make a change.

Dave lived with this nagging dissatisfaction for six years. Here's why:

- **Not enough pain to justify the change** – In his mind, his dissatisfaction wasn't bad enough to justify taking a risk that might jeopardize the security of his current situation. He hadn't reached the threshold of pain that would motivate him to make a change.
- **Irrational fear** – In his imagination he blew up all the bad things that might happen if he were to make a change. He focused on what he could lose or what could go wrong, rather than on what might be better. His fears had no basis in reality—he hadn't even explored what kind of change he would like to make.
- **Self-limiting beliefs** – He believed his current job and his salary were the best he could get. He thought he ought to be satisfied with what he had. After all, many other people would really like to have a job as good as his. Plus, he had bumped up against his internal limit of how much money he felt he deserved or was capable of making (for most people, this is an explicit dollar amount). He also believed he lacked the qualifications to do anything else and therefore he was stuck with his current career.
- **Lack of vision** – Most importantly, he didn't have an explicit vision of what he really wanted.

Like so many other people, Dave was unaware of his own value and power. He already had everything he needed inside him to do something bigger, better, and more fulfilling. He just needed some help tapping into that power.

When Dave asked me to coach him in getting out of his career slump, I asked him, "What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail?" He went completely blank. Over our next few weeks of coaching, Dave worked at figuring out his vision. Coaching provided the venue and the

structure for him to do personal inventory, soul-searching, and practical research. He started by identifying what skills he most enjoyed using and what he was passionate about. He was quite savvy about marketing and he loved strategizing creative solutions to marketing problems. He identified that he was passionate about technology and using the power of the Internet to help give smaller companies the ability to compete against the "big boys."

Through coaching, Dave decided that he wanted to manage the creation and implementation of Internet-based marketing campaigns for high tech products. An important part of our work was to come up with the deeper purpose for what he wanted to do—*why* he wanted to have this kind of career. Dave's purpose was to use his creative and strategic planning skills and knowledge of the high-tech market to help small and midsize companies compete against big companies with larger marketing budgets. Furthermore, he wanted to make enough money to support his family and begin saving for his kids' college education. Dave had completed "step 1": defining his vision.

At first, Dave was somewhat overwhelmed by his vision—it seemed like a huge leap and he felt he had too little relevant experience to qualify for the kind of work he wanted to do. He had serious doubts that his vision was sensible and that he could pull it off.

A big part of the coaching process is breaking big or seemingly unrealistic objectives into manageable doable chunks. I coached Dave in planning the specific steps to achieve his vision and managing his attitude and actions. We also worked on changing his limiting beliefs about how much money he deserved and could make. Once he had an explicit idea of what he wanted, it was relatively easy to create a step-by-step plan for going after it.

Three months after creating his vision, Dave achieved the first objective in his plan: he landed a copywriting job at a small Internet marketing agency where he could eventually work his way up to making his vision a reality. Part of his plan was a strategy for being promoted to a strategic marketing position. Dave employed his strategy and now, a year and a half later, he's thriving in the job of his dreams and making over \$95,000 a year. Plus, he's providing for his family and saving for his children's higher education.

Dave, who was unhappy and uncertain about what he wanted in his career, made a remarkable shift in his life. It all began with having the courage to design his vision. Had he not created an explicit vision of what he wanted, he'd probably still be at his old job, discontent and frustrated.

The Critical Elements of a Vision

Passion – A vision incorporates your passion. In my coaching practice, I’ve found that almost everyone is passionate about something, but many people haven’t identified it, recognized it, or figured out how to incorporate it into their life in a meaningful or practical way. My client Dave based his vision on his passions for technology, the Internet, and strategizing creative solutions to marketing problems.

Specificity – A vision is a *specific* result you want to achieve in the future. For example, a desire to change careers is *not* a vision because there’s no specificity about what kind of career. Dave fantasized about working in the technology field, but until he designed his specific vision, mapped out the steps to achieve it, and followed through with his plan, he was just dreaming. Your description of your vision must be explicit enough that you’ll know when you’ve achieved it.

Purpose – A vision is rooted in a deeper purpose. If your vision is the *what*, your purpose is the *why*. It is crucial to know the purpose of your vision, because ultimately, it is the purpose that will provide you with the deepest motivation to accomplish it. Your purpose reflects the values that are most important to you. If you think your purpose is to be successful or to make a lot of money, dig deeper—for what purpose do you want to become successful or make more money?

Impact – In working toward your vision, you have the power to help and inspire others. Dave’s vision will impact not only himself, but also his company, his clients, and his family. Whatever results we generate for ourselves can also impact those around us. When designing the purpose for your vision, why not set out to impact others intentionally, rather than as an accidental by-product of your actions.

Inspiring – A well-thought-out vision is inspiring. It builds on your passion, values, purpose, and the impact you want to have on others. The way you articulate your vision can go a long way toward making it inspire you and the others whose aid you’ll enlist in going after it. Dave could have said, “I want to be an Internet marketing manager.” That sounded dry and relatively uninspiring. Instead he articulated his vision as follows: “I want to harness the power of the Internet to create and manage guerilla marketing campaigns for small, innovative technology companies, so that they can effectively compete against large companies with huge marketing budgets.”

Positively stated – An empowering and sustaining vision is stated in the positive; in other words, it’s something you want to move *toward*, not *away from*. An example of a positively stated vision is, “I see myself trim, fit, and at

my optimum weight: 160. I have more energy, I’m working out at least four times a week, and I’m healthy.” The emphasis in this vision is what I want to move toward. In contrast, an example of a negatively stated vision is: “I want to lose 50 pounds, so I can stop looking so sloppy and people will quit making fun of me.” The emphasis in this vision is what I don’t want or what I wish to avoid, rather than what I want to move toward. A positively stated vision promotes creative thinking, problem solving, and enthusiasm, whereas a negatively stated vision underscores your negative feelings and attitudes about your present circumstances.

Some Examples of Vision

Vision need not be limited to your career or business objectives. You can have a vision in any area of your life. Here are some examples:

- Joe’s vision is to own a 50-foot sailboat, so that he can share with his family and friends his love of the ocean and sailing, while relaxing, connecting, having fun, and appreciating nature.
- Margie’s vision is to do the AIDS fundraising bike ride from San Francisco to Los Angeles, so she will have a goal for getting into outstanding physical condition, garner financial support and publicity for a cause she deeply believes in, and have a great time and meet interesting people on a gorgeous ride along the California coastline.
- Donna’s vision is to create an after-school program in which college students mentor needy inner-city kids and help them with their homework, so that the kids will do better in their schoolwork, have someone to talk to about their problems and issues, and develop their self-esteem. Another purpose for her vision is to help college students learn the value of community service and mentoring.

The Difference between a Dream and a Vision

No doubt you’ve heard the expression, “he’s a dreamer,” referring to someone who has big ideas but doesn’t put them into action. Contrast that with the expression, “he’s a visionary,” meaning someone who not only sees a picture of the future, but declares his vision and takes steps to make it happen. The difference between a dream and a vision is specificity, commitment, and action. Most people don’t take their dreams seriously, and consequently their dreams remain unfulfilled. When you decide to take your dream seriously and go for it with a plan and deliberate action, it becomes a vision.

What Next?

If you don't have an inspiring vision for your future, it's never too late to create one. Once you've formulated a vision, you can create a timeline and a plan, and execute the necessary steps to turn it into reality. If you'd like support in formulating or carrying out your vision, you may want to consider working with a coach who is an expert helping people focus on their future and achieve whatever results they're after. You'll be in good company—more and more business leaders and others who want to excel are working with coaches to help them rise to their best. No matter what level you're at, having the dedicated and objective support of someone who is fully committed to helping you create, refine, and achieve your vision can be a powerful advantage.

Our chief want is finding someone that will make us do what we can.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

I wish you great luck and good fortune in turning your own vision into reality!

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