

# ACCESSING THE POWER OF VISION

BY JOHN VARNEY

Vision may be both a blessing and a curse – and I've experienced both. For 30 years I have been possessed by my initial idea to establish a special centre for management groups to think and to grow. The vision has sustained the project through many setbacks and several incarnations. But more recently I have seen it come to life in a way that touches everyone who comes into contact with it.

The word 'vision' is often used loosely, meaning no more than a sound-bite to head up the business plan. Alternatively it can refer to a profound perception of purpose – a 'seeing within', with the brilliance of a Damascene experience. Such vision is a gift and our role is to be receptive to it. As with St. Paul, it may be other than what we expected, requiring that we change our lives to accommodate it.

Linguistically, obviously, vision is connected with seeing. But what kind of seeing is it? In the organizational context we need people to see where they are going, and hence to perform their individual roles. Vision is the glimpse of a guiding pattern that motivates and aligns. Vision is the right use of imagination.

Processes of co-creation will usually achieve clearer vision than any handed down by a hierarchical leader. Is it really likely, in a complex society, that one person can have the whole picture? Co-creation includes all stakeholders: sales as well as production; investors and customers as well as makers and managers. Co-creation can best be achieved with methodologies which express individual units of meaning as objects which can be manipulated to make sense. Because such processes increase the diversity of input, the resultant picture can, importantly, be representative of the whole system.

Although a picture constructed from component parts, like a kit-car, may unite us, it is not sufficient to raise our game. A necessary complement needs to be drawn through inference and inspiration. Through 'serious play', we integrate meaning from the fragments each contributes

to achieve 'wholeness' at a higher level. The 'Aha – now I SEE!' is cathartic. It brings us to a decision point in which our intent connects with the unrealized future. Vision thus embraced as an act of will has extraordinary power. Like mountaineers committing themselves to a challenging climb, it is not until the sacrifices and struggles have been made that the vista from the summit is revealed.

Clarity of Vision raises aspirations and aligns energies with the common intent, enabling people to bring their endeavour to life. Such vitality requires harmonization of three fundamentals:

**Function** – The time-bound process of realizing the Vision

**Being** – Becoming all that we can be through the journey to the Vision

**Will** – Deciding to accept the challenge of the Vision

Not everyone can 'hold' the Vision all the time. Keeping the Vision in sight is the work of leadership. At any moment, the person who sees most clearly – who can interpret the current circumstances in relation to the Vision - is best placed to lead those around them.

Vision itself, a link to a state of affairs yet-to-be-realized, is outside of time, although its realization will be enacted as a time-based process.

The journey is what matters. Once committed to a Vision, we are in a position to act. In striving to achieve our desire, being tested by what transpires and growing as a result, we travel a road that will add our unique cycle to history.

---

**John Varney** is founder and chief executive of the Centre for Management Creativity in the UK, works with senior managers to develop strategic dynamism and manage cultural changes. A mountaineer and psychological group leader with a first career in architecture, Varney's work focuses on awakening people's innate creative capabilities and awareness of leadership responsibility.

"Like mountaineers committing themselves to a challenging climb, it is not until the sacrifices and struggles have been made that the vista from the summit is revealed."

