TOOLKIT presents

Drawing Forth Personal Vision

By Charlotte Roberts, Bryan Smith, Rick Ross
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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.

Pick a locale where you can sit or recline in privacy, a quiet and relaxed space to write, with comfortable furniture and no glaring light or other visual distractions. Play a favourite piece of music (or work in silence if you prefer). Most importantly, give yourself a block of time for this exercise—at least an hour, on a day relatively free of hassle. Hold your phone calls and visitors for that duration.

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 centred.

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 favourite 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.”** Pretending you could have anything you want may not be an easy task. Many people find that it contradicts a habit held since childhood: “Don’t think too much about what you want, because you might not get it.” In a pre-emptive strike against disappointment, they denigrate any object of their deep desires. “It’ll never live up to expectations anyway.” Or they may feel they have to trade it off against something else: they can have a successful career or a satisfying family life, but not both.

In this exercise, you are trying to learn what your vision is. The question of whether it is possible is literally irrelevant. (That’s part of current reality. Suspend your doubts, worries, fears, and concerns about the limits of your future. Write, for the moment, as if real life could live up to your deepest wishes: What would happen then?)

- **“I want what someone else wants.”** Some people choose their visions based on what they think other people will want for them: a parent, a teacher, a supervisor, or a spouse. For the duration of this exercise, concentrate on what you want. You may find yourself articulating that you want a good relationship with (for example) your spouse; you want the time to devote to that relationship, the understanding to act wisely within it, and the ability to live up to the mutual commitments you have made to each other. But you should include it only if you want it for yourself—not because you think your spouse would want it.

- **“It doesn’t matter what I want.”** Some people assume that what they want is not important. They scribble out whatever comes to mind quickest, just to get “any old vision that sounds good” down on paper. Later, when they need a coherent personal vision as a foundation for further learning, their haste turns out to have been counterproductive. Do not belittle yourself; if, like many of us, you have doubts about whether you deserve rewards, imagine the rewards you would want if you did deserve them.

- **“I already know what I want.”** During this exercise, you may create a new sense of what you want, especially if you have not asked yourself this question for some time. A personal vision is not a done deal, already existing and waiting for you to unearth and decode it. It is something you create, and continue to re-create, throughout your life.

- **“I am afraid of what I want.”** Sometimes people say, “Well, what if I didn’t want to stay at my job anymore?” Others are afraid that if they let themselves start wanting things, they’ll get out of control, or be forced to change their lives.

Since this is your vision, it can’t “run away” with you; it can only increase your awareness. Nonetheless, we suggest that you set your own limits on this exercise. If a subject frightens you too much, ignore it. However, the fact that you feel uneasy about something may be a clue to potential learning. A year from now, or two, you may want to come back to that subject—at your discretion.

- **“I don’t know what I want.”** In The Empowered Manager, Peter Block offers an effective approach with people who say they don’t have a personal vision (“of greatness,” as he calls it) for themselves. In effect, he says, not to believe them:
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.” Some people fear their personal vision won’t be compatible with their organization’s attitudes. Even by thinking about it, and bringing these hopes to the surface, they may jeopardize their job and position. This attitude keeps many people from articulating their vision or letting this exercise go very far.

This is really a question of current reality. As such, the perception is worth testing. Occasionally, someone we know does test it; by asking other members of the organization what they really think of this “dangerous” proposed vision. More often than not, the answer is: “It’s no big deal.” When approached directly, organizations tend to be far more accepting of our goals and interests for ourselves than our fears lead us to expect.

Nonetheless, you may be right about your vision’s unacceptability. If you can’t have it at work at this place, then your vision might include finding another place to work that will allow you to grow and flourish.

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? What impact would you like your efforts to have?
• 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-centred 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.

This material has been adapted in part from two separate Innovation Associates exercises "Vision Escalation" and "Power of Choice."