

GETTING TO SHARED VISIONS

For many years, organizational vision was something that only leaders developed. In the traditional model, the leader sat at the top of the organization, developed an inspired vision, sent it down through the ranks, and demanded that it be cherished and followed. Now, new models are emerging that dispute the effectiveness of this top-down approach, probably the most notable of which is Peter Senge's shared vision model. In his book, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (1990), Senge suggests that developing a shared vision is the only way leaders can insure that individuals will commit to the organization's mission and values and will believe that their efforts have meaning and purpose. The purpose of this article is to stimulate thinking on three aspects of shared visioning: precepts for creating shared visions, tips for mastering co-creating, and creating opportunities to engage in shared visioning.

Precepts for Creating Shared Visions

The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization (Senge et al. 1994: 298-299) states that the successful method for creating a shared vision builds upon six key precepts.

- Every organization has a deep purpose underlying its reason for existence.
- Clues to understanding that deeper purpose can often be detected in the founders' aspirations and reasons for bringing the organization into being.
- Visions that tap into an organization's deeper sense of purpose and articulate specific goals that make that purpose real have unique power to engender inspiration and commitment.
- Many members of the organization, especially those who care deeply for it, have a collective sense of its underlying purpose.
- At the heart of building a shared vision is the task of designing 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.
- When each member of the organization is involved, a clear picture of the organization's vision is created, and the difference between that vision and current reality will propel individual action.

We can conclude that creating shared visions is particularly challenging to organizations that still adhere to more traditional hierarchical models of management. Many court systems fall into this category; thus, court leaders who want to engage in shared visioning will find the process harder to manage because it is so new to the court culture. The important thing is not to shut down when everything seems out of control. "One senior executive, talking about his newly energized team, said coming to work was like 'trying to steer seven wild horses instead of beating seven dead horses to move'" (Senge et al. 1994: 304).

Tips for Mastering Co-Creating

Shared visions do not just happen, they are co-created. Tips for mastering co-creating from Senge et al. (1994: 323-326) are:

Start with Personal Visions: Shared visioning results in individuals seeing the organization as a vehicle for realizing their full potential instead of being something they are subservient to. Through this transition, individuals are able to participate in guiding the direction of the organization.

Treat Everyone as Equal: Shared visioning is a democratic process where everyone gets one vote, including those with more status.

Seek Alignment, Not Agreement: When differences surface, individuals find out their origins and factor them into the process.

Avoid Sampling: To be successful, shared visioning requires the opportunity for everyone who is affected to give. Anything less sends the signal that not everyone is important, and it undermines the development of individual leadership.

Expect and Nurture Reverence for Each Other: The vital organization creates an environment where diversity of opinion is embraced and honored. Appreciating each other's vision is the cornerstone of successful visioning.

Consider Using an "Interim Vision" to Build Momentum: To get started, it may be helpful to put an interim vision on the table as a point of reference. As a new vision is developed, the interim vision is withdrawn in favor of the new one. This process demonstrates how visions can change and represents the very core of the aligning process inherent in shared visioning.

Focus on the Dialogue, Not Just the Vision Statement: The true test of the vision statement that results from this process is the directional force it gives the organization. Thus, the process is more important than the product, because each word has been labored over and holds great meaning for those who gave their time and heart to the process.

Creating Opportunities to Engage in Shared Visioning

Shared visioning is not an activity that most individuals place on their calendars as a "must do." Day-to-day work often takes precedence over more lofty activities like visioning. Yet this article suggests that engaging in shared visioning is an essential element of any organization that wishes to maintain its vitality. Opportunities to engage in shared visioning must be created, and the National Symposium on the Future of Judicial Branch Education is just such an opportunity. Through a shared visioning process, attendees will wrestle with their hopes, dreams, and desires for the future of the courts and judicial branch education.

References

- Senge, Peter M. (1990). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday/Currency.
- Senge, Peter M., Art Kleiner, Charlotte Roberts, Richard B. Ross, and Bryan J. Smith. (1994). *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday/Currency.

