



Vision Quest: Part 2 – Reality vs Fantasy – How to Get What You Really Need

S. Eric Christensen, Ed.D.

Vision Quest: Part 1, What You Get is Rarely What You Need concludes with the following thoughts:

Identifying the core problem with Vision Quests is relatively simple and probably obvious.

Organizations spend an incredible amount of time and energy putting Vision/Vision Statements together, but unfortunately no one can remember the words let alone what they are supposed to mean. Most Visions become nothing more than a meaningless poster on the wall!

Why do we spend so much time, energy, and resources on Visioning efforts? Because clearly, when it works it has an amazing impact. Equally clear is that it does not work very often. The real question is how do you get what you need? How is a Vision crafted and made real and alive? How do you make sure it is not just another forgettable slogan?

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The first foundational principle that supports any and all effective and robust Visions is really simple. The principle is **Reality Trumps Fantasy**. Every time! What companies put out there as Visions are such end state, drug induced fantasies that the people in the organization quickly know it is just a bunch of malarkey. Huge amounts of time are spent wondering and day dreaming about what the heck the facility will look like in 5 or 10 years, when it is inconceivable that the organization could get there in 25 years.

There is this unspoken, unanalyzed mindset that Visions are intended to be perfect reflections of achievable end state fantasies. We will become an ownership-based work system, yet our present environment is one of employee/management internecine warfare, combined with unreliable and undercapitalized equipment, staffed by uncaring and unmotivated employees, led by command and control freaks where everyone is pulling their oars in countless different directions. Somehow a magic wand is waved, the silver bullet is found and voila a self-actualized team environment is created, usually in a few months no less!

In a major capital project in the Paper Industry part of the Vision for a new Product System was that **no human being would touch the paper** once it left the end of the paper machine until it was driven away from the loading docks. In a paper mill this is a long way to travel. The route from a paper machine to converting department to loading docks is complicated and dangerous. The automated



handling systems must navigate multiple intersections, doors, pedestrian cross walks and all sorts of other obstacles.

This organization’s Vision also included there would never be a lift truck operating in the Converting Department! If you are familiar with heavy manufacturing/continuous process operations, you know that never having a lift truck on the converting floor was seen by the workforce as the dream of very naïve and very foolish salaried employees. It is a great dream, but not one that was ever achievable in the available time frame! It was just not possible. It took over 18 months to get any of the automatic transfer equipment to work as intended.

The first day paper was made lift trucks were required. Lift trucks were required to transport and stage paper rolls, and to load converted product onto the trucks and rail cars to be shipped. The operators were laughing and crying. The mechanics were laughing and crying. Operators and mechanics knew the stated Vision would not and could not work. Nevertheless, the workforce had to live with the consequences of a Vision that over reached terribly. They paid the price of brutal hours, brutal working conditions and brutal reality. Everyone that worked on the floor was saying I told you so.

It was not aspirational, uplifting or motivating. It was the exact opposite. It crushed hope, destroyed trust, and made people bitter and suspicious!

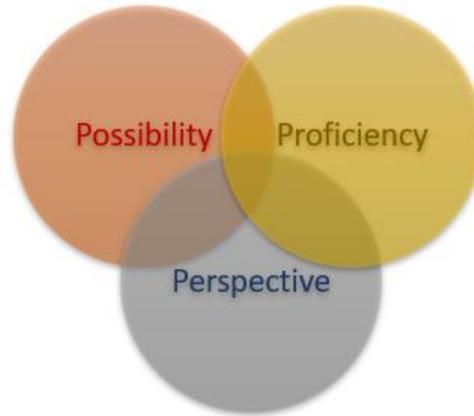
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They are by their very nature – bold!

This is not to say that “no human beings and no lift trucks” was not or is not the place that this organization needed to get to. It is critically important to set out stretch goals, big leaps. Visions are not small teeny steps, nor easy to achieve. They are by their very nature – bold! Hand in hand with bold leaps goes turmoil and chaos. Almost always bold Vision requires working in concert with other employees in profoundly different ways. Often it means adding and modifying job responsibilities such that they become unrecognizable compared to current state.

The critical question is how to get there, and if the there is unbelievable then you are doomed to fail. Guaranteed! My advice is to confront, in a brutally honest way, current reality. Start from what is. Do not talk about creating a transformational change endeavor that reaches such a glorious Vision that the Harvard Business School will want to write it up as a case study.

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Proficiency, Possibility and Perspective.

Simply put Vision is the Venn diagram intersection of **Proficiency**, **Possibility** and **Perspective**.¹⁾



Possibility is focused on leverage points, often linked to projected major change initiatives. Is there an upcoming capital project? Is there a new product launch or modification? Perhaps a facility wide operator skills training initiative is planned. There are a host of opportunities. **Proficiency** is focused on the skill of the workforce. Is the workforce capable of performing maintenance tasks, change overs? Are they able to flow to work? Are they qualified in multiple tasks and jobs? Are they self-directed? Do leaders empower and inspire? **Perspective** is focused on the business outlook. What is the competitive landscape? What is the risk reward analysis? Is there time to experiment or is there business doom on the horizon.

Vision comes from where all three intersect. As is shown in the diagram this is a very small subset of the total set of options – a very small subset.

If the organization has no upcoming major capital projects (**Possibility**), is perfectly happy with the current state (**Perspective**), then acting on a Vision that requires everything to be turned upside down (**Possibility**) and inside out is probably a non-starter. If you are staring shut downs and curtailments in the face (**Perspective**), then the Vision may be as simple as doing what is necessary to survive. Economic crisis (**Perspective**) eliminates many options and opens up others. You cannot have flow to work (**Proficiency/Possibility**) if operators are not qualified at executing multiple tasks (**Proficiency**), in multiple jobs (**Proficiency**), as needed. You cannot reasonably expect a workforce that has never been responsible and accountable (**Possibility/Proficiency**) for much of anything to become self-directed (**Possibility**) in a few months. It just will not happen.

Proficiency for some reason is often the most difficult of the three elements to evaluate and accept. The inability of Leadership to realistically judge organizational effectiveness and skill, continues to stun and amaze. Either that or the shiny gold ring of creating a High-Performance Work Team or an Ownership Based Work system overwhelms practical thought and action. Most leaders believe there is a competitive advantage to Ownership Based systems. Most leaders want it in their business. However, having the Vision of High Performance and doing the work necessary to get High Performance are two very, very different things.

Do not get hung up on precise definitions of these three terms. They are intended to be a guide. They are intended to help one think about what a creative, stretch and attainable Vision might be. All three are critical and Vision is the intersection of these three elements, not just one or two.



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1) 10 plus years ago while a member of Koch Industries Market Based Management team, I saw a version of this Venn diagram centered on a free market perspective, using free market language. I have never come across anything like it in a classroom setting or in print since that time. I believe I have made this model more powerful, simpler and useable.



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