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Finding Vision, Courage and Your Dreams

By Jerry Stein



As I was finishing a chapter on executive leadership and peak performance for my new book with Stephen Covey and Brian Tracy, I was asked to give a few examples of my clients' success stories. The more I got into developing the list, the more I had to work at condensing their stories -- because we're all unique, and it's the behind-the-scenes details that are so fascinating.

Sure, I can rattle off a list of clients and describe their "before" and "after" situations, but that's not the story that needs to be told. You see, a mere list misses the critical issues and full richness of the experiences these wonderful people faced during significant periods of their lives.

So what do people need as they face significant challenges or critical periods of growth in their lives? Well, I don't think you can effectively separate personal and professional issues; as a professional coach, I look at how the person functions as a whole. In that light, I'll share with you a brief overview of one of my clients' stories, along with a few insights.

Bob H., a new CEO for a technology company, came to the Executive Roundtable to share in our best-practices module. He was in an impossible situation, with an international board of directors made up of high-profile, wealthy venture capitalists. There was a noticeable leadership vacuum in the company; major decisions and key hires needed to be made to put the company into the black, but Bob was being micromanaged by his own board and was intimidated by their wealth and status.

He needed to make some critical decisions based on his professional knowledge and ability -- but he also had a family to feed. Nevertheless, within a year he had implemented a new strategy, reformatting the board and getting its support; making those key hires and critical decisions that needed to be made; and had the company in the black six months later.

It sounds simple, but it wasn't. First, Bob had to change his mind-set. He needed to fully understand the situation he was in. He really only had two choices: Make the tough decision to grow the company

and risk getting fired, or start looking elsewhere to develop his career. That's not easy for someone to accept. You may know it, and the client may know it, but that doesn't mean they can *hear* it.

If he accepted the status quo, the outcome was certain and unacceptable -- a slow corporate death. Other options had been explored and failed, so in coaching Bob, it boiled down to understanding a major, bottom-line ground truth about leadership: A leader must have the vision and the courage to make the best possible decisions.

Of course, as his coach, I believed Bob had the professional ability to make it happen. Still, while I can get my clients ready to play the game, *they* have to play it — after all, it's their life. My job was to support Bob during this process by hearing what's not said, and seeing what's not visible.

In Bob's case, he needed clarity in a complex situation. I knew he couldn't take the needed steps until he changed his mind-set and fully understood his situation. Bob had to be ready to exercise his vision and make the tough decisions, and be ready to deal with the consequences. Once he realized that, and acted upon that realization, he got it done.

Many of us have had dreams of something we wanted to create or pursue, but for some reason we did not. Let me encourage you to go back -- pick up those dreams and dust them off. Take a good look at them from different angles; write down the feelings you would have in your life if your dreams were a reality. Put them in a notebook or computer, *and don't let anybody rain on your dreams*.

Nothing would ever have been created in this world had it not been for people who were just like you pursuing their dreams. Goethe, the famous German philosopher, said, "Whatever you dream or think you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now!"

One of the greatest gifts you can give to your children, to yourself, to your employees or to your leadership team is the permission and encouragement to create and follow their dreams. Now that is a gift of true leadership; *helping others to find their voice*.

This is the eighth habit that is the subject of Stephen Covey's latest book, *The 8th Habit*, and it is a key element of coaching: Recognizing that everyone has talent.

If you help others bloom, you bring a significant gift to the world. People will follow you into battle; they will give you their all. You will further develop your leadership skills. Then, as you develop your vision of what can be, others will buy into your vision, and you will create the momentum to make it happen. This is true in business as well as in your personal life; just ask Arthur Blank, co-founder of The Home Depot and owner of The Atlanta Falcons.

Another great leader once said, “Reasonable men adapt themselves to the world. Unreasonable men attempt to adapt the world to them. There would be no progress in the world were it not for unreasonable men.”

What are we talking about here? The concept that if you have your passion and your heart in something, you can “build it and they will come.”

Oh, it doesn’t have to be perfect. People will sense your passion and your commitment; they will want you to succeed, and many will help you without your even asking them. Your passion, thoughts and actions will bring the physical manifestations of your dream into reality.

Let me share with you a story I believe demonstrates this concept. When I began the Executive Roundtable (a coaching organization of executive peer groups and leadership development programs), participation was small. But it grew rapidly, and then caught on like wildfire. I had the necessary credentials, plus many years of experience and training. I knew I could do it, but nothing existed in the field of executive education and leadership training that resembled my vision. That was the seed that sparked the development of the Stein Model of Executive Peer Groups.

The same holds true for actors, athletes and politicians. They couldn’t succeed without their dreams, and those dreams are full of passion, commitment and the will to succeed.

You will never be as happy as when you are working toward your dream. Of course, when you finally achieve that dream, there is sometimes a letdown; that’s human nature. That’s also the time when you must create *another* dream. It is then and only then that you are at your best -- fully energized and mobilized. It is when you feel most alive. And that’s what it means to enjoy the journey. The destination is fine, but the joy is in the journey. All of you have a dream — build it and they will come!

About the author:

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