

The Vision Thing

"By believing passionately in something that still does not exist, we create it. The nonexistent is whatever we have not sufficiently desired."

.....Nikos Kazantasaki

Much has been said and written about the power of visioning. My favorite graphic on the subject is two furry caterpillars looking at a beautiful butterfly and underneath the caption reads "Now that's what I call a vision!"

Names that come to mind when we talk about vision include Walt Disney, Martin Luther King, Jr. and John F. Kennedy. Each could articulate a compelling picture of the future – an astonishing theme park, a dream of harmony, a man on the moon – and we could share that vision with them.

Visioning is a powerful mental image and dynamic picture of the future we are trying to create. It is an integral and enjoyable part of the strategic planning process. When asked to envision the organization and the community 3 to 5 years down the road, participants are being asked, "What do we really want?" If we could have the optimal organization what would it look like, who would we serve, what would be our mix of programs and services, and how would the community be different?

The most interesting vision I have been a part of helping to facilitate was with an amateur theatre group. They saw their organization as a vibrant, healthy and continuously growing home for the performing arts – visually exciting and accessible to all - complete with a Fame School, recitals and gallery shows, experimental theater and public speaking classes. They saw their organization as a place for dreaming and developing, for pretending and presenting and generating enough energy to foster a cultural and social renaissance in the area. They were big dreamers and while I would be leading you on, if I said they had achieved all of this, this energy has attracted new board members, new benefactors and a much needed facility face-lift.

The stakeholders of a soup kitchen, which is located in a former I school cafeteria a la the 1950's, envisioned a warm, and homey dining area where guests could feel like they had been invited to a special meal with friends. A state of the art kitchen, an expanded menu with more whole meals and an ongoing community image campaign were all part of their dream.

Since that visioning session, a sorority has since made curtains for the dining room. Their latest newsletter reported that the Rotary club had presented them a check for various kitchen items and table covers. According to the newsletter, "While table covers may appear to be a luxury item, they are important to living out the full mission. The tables in the dining room are well worn and unsightly. The table covers add a touch of warmth that goes a long way in saying *you are welcome here.*"

The visioning process helps organizations to focus energy, agree on a direction, and engage in a realistic and informed assessment of what might be attainable. I like to think of visioning as making a motion picture in Technicolor with surround sound and a complete cast of characters. You need to be able to see it and feel it. An attractive, ambitious and widely shared vision can be the catalyst that drives an organization toward excellence and long range success.

If you want to read more about visioning helpful publications include:

- ✍ Organizational Vision, Values and Mission
by Cynthia D. Scott, M.P.H., Ph.D., Dennis T. Jaffe, Ph.D. &
Glenn R. Tobe, M.A. Crisp Publications, Inc.

If you would like to talk to Pat about having her work with your organization on the visioning process as part of strategic planning, contact her today.

