

July 19, 2016

# VISION FROM THE HEART

Mark E. Mendenhall

J. Burton Frierson Chair of Excellence in Business Leadership  
College of Business  
University of Tennessee, Chattanooga

At its core, the process of creating a vision lies in the hearts and desires of people in positions of authority – be it presidents, executives, parents, coaches, or elementary school principals. This is the black box that is “untrainable.” Vaclav Havel, the former president of Czechoslovakia, once stated that, "A politician must become a person again...He must believe not only in...statistics, but also in real people. He must trust not only an objective interpretation of reality, but also his own soul; not only an adopted ideology, but also his own thoughts (Havel, 1992).”

One can replace the word "politician" with "manager" or "principal" or "hospital administrator" or any other position of authority. For example, a CEO I know of was motivated to create a new vision for his company due to the fact that he felt uncomfortable about how people were being treated within his organization. His company was doing well profit-wise, but he didn't like the process of how the company was making money. His discomfort led to introspection, study, and the emergence over time within him of a new set of beliefs about how companies should be managed. Only then, with the depth of his new beliefs, was he courageous enough to embark on a new vision.

Also, visions are not confined to the mind of the CEO. If CEOs come up with personal visions without getting input along the way from senior executives and other employees there will be little support when they try to sell their visions to their organizations. Thus, wise leaders begin the process, but share their ideas with others all along the way, refining the vision as it is being formulated. Vision comes from integrity. It is not something that can be created out of ulterior motives. Vision only becomes powerful when people sense that sincerity, good faith, and a concern for the whole rather than the few is at the center of it – then it becomes powerful.

Perhaps Dietrich Bonhoeffer best summarized the foundation that underlies the creation of vision: "The ultimate question for a responsible man to ask is...how the coming generation is to live. It is only from this question, with its responsibility towards history, that fruitful solutions can come..." (Bethge, 2000).

Vision emerges when someone truly cares about, and feels responsible for, an organization.

## REFERENCES

Bethge, E. (2000). *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, p. 797. Havel--From an editorial in the Chattanooga Times--syndicated columnist.

Havel, V. (1992). "The End of the Modern Era." Speech given at the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland on February 4, 1992. His address is excerpted at: [http://vaclavhavel.cz/showtrans.php?cat=projevy&val=265\\_aj\\_projevy.html&typ=HTML](http://vaclavhavel.cz/showtrans.php?cat=projevy&val=265_aj_projevy.html&typ=HTML)