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The Magic of Vision

The First Principle for Distinction in Excellence

by **Joan Garbo**

"A three sentence course of business management: You read a book from the beginning to the end. You run a business the opposite way. You start with the end, and then do everything you must to reach it."

– Harold Geneen, former CEO of ITT Managing

Some of the most profound lessons in life come from the least expected sources and at the most unexpected times.

In 1989, I was in the Chicago O'Hare Airport with a two-hour layover between flights. I went into a ladies' restroom for a much needed redo of my face. There was a woman maintenance worker in there cleaning the commodes, singing and whistling away as she bustled from one stall to the other. During the next 10 minutes or so, two other women workers came in to hob knob with her for a few minutes, and I noticed that they left in much better spirits than when they had entered. I was fascinated by this woman's joyful attitude. I intentionally slowed down my makeover, hoping there might be a moment when the restroom would empty and give me an opportunity to speak with her alone.

The moment came, and I stopped her just as she was about to leave. "Pardon me," I said. "I would like to ask you something." She smiled at me and waited for me to continue. "I'm really amazed at how happy you seem to be doing this kind of work. I mean, cleaning out public toilets doesn't show up on most people's top 100 things they want to do in life; and frankly, I've never seen anyone so upbeat doing this kind of work."

Well, she looked at me as if I were crazy and said, "Honey, I figure any time I'm unhappy with what I'm doing, that's the Devil temptin' me!"

Then she said, "Let me ask you something. You been traveling all day?" I said I had. She continued, "Don't you want a nice clean place to come into where you don't have to worry about where you sit or where you are when you're doing what you're doing?"

I said, "Sure I do. In fact, I was impressed with how clean this restroom was."

"Well, good. Then what I do matters, and I got my job done!" And that was that.

I was impressed. That lady had created a personal context around her work that empowered her and helped lighten up her coworkers as well. The power of this context demonstrates that when satisfaction is something you bring to work, the work will be satisfying, no matter what the work is.

As this woman further demonstrates, you need not be Jonas Salk or Zig Ziglar to have a vision and a purpose that inspires and motivates yourself and others. Vision is the magic and power of context. With vision comes inspiration. With inspiration come motivation and satisfaction and resourcefulness. Without it, people are reduced to seeking fulfillment from sources that at best can provide only gratification. Without it, people start working for a paycheck and benefits that are never enough, and their focus shifts to a "what's in it for me" mode of thinking.

Vision has the power of determining actions. Without a clearly defined vision, actions are determined by prevailing and sometimes uncontrollable circumstances. Every time I have worked with a professional practice that is in trouble, at the root of the problem is the fact that the doctor has either lost sight of, or has failed to effectively communicate the vision that inspired him/her through years of schooling, financial struggle and personal hardships. The only way you can achieve your goals for the practice and for your life is to have people who are willing and able to help take you there. If they do not know where exactly "there" is or why you are going there, you will have a lot of struggle trying to get there.

One of the most impactful actions a doctor can take is to share his/her vision for the practice and to PUT IT IN

WRITING. The fact that it is in writing doesn't mean it is set in stone! In fact most people have difficulty writing out their visions, and consequently they will spend a significant amount of time wordsmithing the statement. This difficulty people encounter is actually a good thing as it is this very process that allows the doctor to sort out and prioritize the values and standards that are the source of the vision statement. Because the process itself is so valuable, many doctors will revisit and revise the vision statement at the start of each year as a means of organizing the year ahead and for planning the strategies for practice growth and development.

It also needs to be understood that the vision statement is not a statement of specific actions or goals. The mission or purpose statement specifies the actions to be taken, and the goals are derived from these stated actions. As Zig Ziglar has said, "You have to be before you do, you have to do before you have." The following illustrates the relationship of vision-purpose-goals:

To demonstrate this relationship and the power of vision and its impact on actions, I will use the following example of a vision statement: My vision is to have a practice that enriches the quality of life and expands the possibilities for satisfaction and joy in the lives of all who participate in it--the staff, patients, me and my family. I want to be known for being a contributor to, and for having made a difference in the quality of life.

The vision of being a contributor of joy and satisfaction to staff, patients, family and self, mandates an action/purpose/mission statement that determines results in the present. The mission statement lets people know the direction in which you are taking the practice and means you will use to get there. The following exemplifies this:

We promise our patients will receive the best orthodontic care in a loving and nurturing atmosphere that compels all involved to feel proud of our relationship and our work, and validates the patient's choice to be a part of our practice.

The doctor and staff then need to define what exactly this statement means in each of the components. For instance, "receive the best orthodontic care..." mandates that the doctor and staff attend meetings and seminars that keep them on the leading edge of technology available, and to continually hone these skills. This includes the administrative staff positions as well so that the flow of work, and the administrative side of treatment runs smoothly and effortlessly.

The patient's experience of treatment must also be considered. Most all of the patients are not technically competent to accurately judge the quality of treatment; yet they do judge and evaluate the quality of treatment based on how they feel when they interact with any staff or the doctor. Therefore, the doctor must attend to his/her own and the staff's people skills, and

commit to training in this area as well. The phrase "...compels all to feel proud of our relationship and our work..." is instrumental in determining policies of the practice, the marketing strategies utilized, and a whole host of decisions that the doctor and staff must make on a daily basis as they encounter individual problems, issues and opportunities.

True empowerment of employees is effected when the vision and purpose statements are thus defined. When people align on these statements, they are elevated to being inspiring in their work: i.e. they "breathe life into" the work they do. To quote author Henry Giles, *"Man must work. That is certain as the sun. But he may work grudgingly or he may work gratefully; he may work as a man, or he may work as a machine. There is no work so rude, that he may not exalt it; no work so impassive, that he may not breathe a soul into it; no work so dull that he may not enliven it."*

In conclusion, if you wish to have your practice distinguished and spoken about as "the best choice for orthodontics" that a patient can make, then build your practice on a foundation of clearly defined principles that empower your staff to support you. ☺

About the Author



Joan Garbo is a trainer and consultant specializing in effective communication skills, team building, and client relations. The results of her work are evidenced in increased client referrals, reduced stress, higher profits, and an increased sense of satisfaction and fun at work.

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