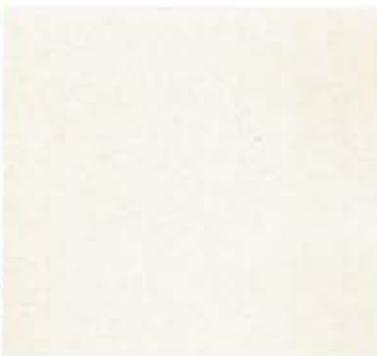


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WOMEN LEADING GOVERNMENT



WHY SO
LITTLE
PROGRESS
IN
30 YEARS?



BY NICOLE GREER

CREATING A VIBRANT CULTURE

Employ the vision technique to see what is possible

Today's local government managers are looking for techniques, not theories, to make the significant changes that demand their attention. In my work with three local governments, putting a coaching technique known as visioning in place **creates** the spark that **makes** a real culture shift happen.

What is needed in government is some fresh thinking. Boggled down at times by tradition that leaves employees with outdated mental models, leaders can use visioning to open up new ways of thinking. This coaching technique encompasses a set of strategies that are easily incorporated into a leader's style, which can alleviate what I see as an inordinate amount of time worrying about resources.

Essentially, leaders must focus on four resources: money, time, energy, and human capital. The emphasis on money is incredibly overemphasized. In fact, it puts a stranglehold on the three remaining resources, creating what coaches call a state of being "stuck in place."

When issues come up, the first reaction is to make a statement about budget, cutbacks, lack, and serious need. Leaders find themselves up against an obstacle that holds them hostage to someone else's power.

While I am aware that money matters, I contend that leaders need to shift their thinking into a more balanced state where they stop to think about how time, energy, and human capital can help alleviate money worries.

Vision Work

Leaders must slow down to think about how to envision the future with the resources they possess in order to see what's possible. To create a culture that is vibrant, one pulsating with energy, excitement, and enthusiasm, a clear

vision must be imagined.

Doing this vision work might be a challenge for the head-down, budget-driven manager. It needs the uncommon character trait called willingness. As author Mike Hernacki states in his classic book *The Ultimate Secret to Getting Everything You Want*, "By way of definition, willingness is a frame of mind which is open to every possible demand, without judgment, reservation, or refusal."

In essence, a leader must be able to see the future along with its demands and create a vision with the resources he or she has versus creating a vision with resources he or she doesn't have.

As author Stephen Covey conducted seminars over the past three decades, he would open up a session with the question, "How many of you are being asked to do more with less?" In a frenzied fashion, the audience would shoot their arms into the air to declare, "That's me."

In the next breath, Covey would ask, "How many of you are at your full potential with no more capacity to grow, learn, or contribute your talents?" And a hush would fall over the room. No one dared to declare that they had reached their maximum capacity. *Hello!* They were at a Stephen Covey seminar where you sharpen your saw.

Then, in Covey's trademark style, he calmly requested, "Reconcile that for me." Covey insisted that people look past the constraints of money and focus on how they could personally harness their time, energy, and human resources to make things possible.

If you are not personally tapped of your potential then you cannot be in a state of being asked to do more with less. The request from your stakeholders is do more with the more you have, namely your energy, time, and human

resources. The leader must be able to envision how this can be done.

Visioning is the first technique in the coaching toolbox. As author Lucia Capacchione states in her book *Visioning*, "Visioning is applied creativity." Visioning is a design process whereby you move through six creative stages that I've consolidated from Capacchione's work and given my own interpretation for organizational development. Using design principles, the leader is building and creating just like an architect, advertising firm, or an engineer.

The Vision Technique

Stage 1: Understand the need. In this stage, the leader chooses a focus area, issue, opportunity, or challenge to invest resources on. The powerful question to answer is: What do I really want the outcome to be? The answer to this question must be charged with positivity and possibilities. The aim is to look at what could be, should be, and why it's imperative.

At this point probability is not considered. The leader writes down what he or she really wants. This stage cannot be skipped. A written down, articulated, and thoughtful declaration of the need behind the design creates urgency that drives the rest of the process. This is your working vision statement.

Stage 2: Research the need. The goal at hand is to compile a collection of data, pictures, and ideas that support the outcome desired in Stage 1. Be careful. This is not the time to dwell on what is wrong, but instead, to be researching what could be, should be, and why.

This is not the time to chase after more proof that there is a problem. The leader is chasing after proof that there is a solution.

This is the time to look to the corporate world, the arts, and history as well as colleagues for inspiration. Create a vision board. Yes, vision boards are for city and county managers, too!

Every design firm creates mock-ups of their products so they can literally "see"

what the future design is going to look like. Like an architect creates a rendering for a new structure, leaders need to create a structure in a vision board that informs the imagination of what is to come.

Stage 3: Connect the research to the need. The goal here is to create a connection between the original vision and the research. The leader carefully discerns what is possible and chooses the key systems, strategies, and smarts that now make the vision probable.

Parts of the original vision may morph at this time and research may be set aside as irrelevant or placed in a file for future use. The core ideas, images, and inspiration for the vision are captured.

Stage 4: Create objectives that support the vision. The leader articulates the objectives the team will pursue to reach the vision. Objectives are principled measurements that support, drive, and

create accountability to move toward the vision.

These objectives are to clearly articulate how you will move forward using the four resources: money, time, energy, and human resources. This is done through a strategic planning process. Implementation of the core ideas, images, and inspiration are turned into the actionable, next right steps.

Stage 5: Create stories about the future. Now is the time to step back and look at the vision board, the objectives, and the strategic plan. The leader uses his or her imagination to see what the future is like once this work is complete. In the process, stories are created.

Leaders must answer these questions to create their stories:

- What stakeholders are impacted by this vision?
- What is the reward for the stakeholder if the vision becomes a reality?

- How is the community remarkably different?
- What does the achievement of this vision tell us about the employees of our city or county?
- What does the achievement of this vision tell us about the citizens of our city or county?

With these questions answered, create two imaginary stakeholders: an employee and a resident. Name them and create a story where the employee and the resident experience the vision. Practice sharing your stories of the future.

Stage 6: Move the vision from possibility to probability. The leader now exercises the essence of leadership, what author John Maxwell calls influence. Using change-management strategies, the leader takes the next right steps toward his or her vision by:

- Conducting private Interviews with key stakeholders, and sharing the vision board, strategic plan, and stories.
- Announcing the vision at a town hall meeting and sharing the vision board, strategic plan, and stories.
- Walking the talk: One-on-one sessions with employees throughout the organization must be done to share the vision board, strategic plan, and stories.
- Conducting coaching in place for key players.
- Clarifying questions.
- Providing necessary skill building needed to carry out the vision.

The vision technique is an ideal tool for a manager. With the plethora of issues that scream for the leader's attention, it's imperative that he or she pull away to a quiet space to gain clarity, to see what is possible. **PM**

LOCAL GOVERNMENT VISIONING

I have had the privilege of working out the vision process with Mooresville, North Carolina, under the leadership of Town Manager Erskine Smith and Human Resource Manager Keli Greer; Centralina Council of Governments, Charlotte, North Carolina, under the leadership of Executive Director Jim Prosser; and Salisbury, Maryland, under the leadership of Assistant City Manager Zach Kyle, Human Resource Manager Ruth Chaparro, and Human Resource Assistant Manager Michelle Nguyen.

While each of these organizations are undertaking the vision process in their own unique way, at the heart of their process is a vision statement to which both senior leaders and emerging leaders within the organization actively contributed. To further instill and co-create behaviors necessary to live out the values of the vision, these organizations have embraced coaching as the catalyst to create significant movement. This has resulted in the behavior change of their staff associates.

Ultimately, they have created a consistent space in the calendar to create a space for:

- **The Art of Dialogue:** a group-coaching technique that builds a safe environment to voice changes that must be made, enables communication, and builds trust.
- **Feedback:** a constructive tool that corrects course and celebrates the wins along the way.
- **Accountability:** a must-do skill that leader's need to create the energy for the vision to move from possible to probable.



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