

ON *PURPOSE*

Vision Quest

by Richard J. Leider and David Peterson

How do new discoveries occur? We know from history that they occur at the edges and that they are generated by the courageous acts of individual pathfinders, who often connect with other pathfinders, who are as deeply committed as they are. Transformational shifts in direction come, as they always have, from the edges, from those who act outside of the normal limits of their organizations and communities; from those willing to embark on vision quests.

In Native American and other cultures, people often go on "vision quests" to seek a new sense of direction and purpose. Historically, the quest was an actual journey taken during periods of confusion or transition. The quester was seeking inspiration and guidance as to how the next stage of life might be lived.

Through our many safaris together in the African bush, we have become more conscious of the value of vision quests. In addition to offering one of the most authentic safari adventures available, we also are attempting to support transformational shifts to new visions.

Our safaris are about adventure and invention—discovering who we are, what we are capable of and where we want to go. We have found that vision comes from deep within us. It is born from inspiration, intuition, nature and silence. Vision quests reveal insights into our true nature and the nature of the world we live in.

New visions and new courage are needed for the new millennium. Vaclav Havel, former president of the Czech Republic, summed it up: "Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better in the sphere of our being as humans, and the catastrophe toward which the world is headed—be it ecological, social,

demographic or a general breakdown of civilization—will be unavoidable."

Many old visions are collapsing, but few clear visions are emerging to fill the gap. For real transformation to occur, we each must embark on vision quests to seek our own new visions that go to the heart of the new world realities which challenge us.

Perhaps, the evolution of our brains did not prepare us for the new visions required for today. In their book, *New World, New Mind*, Robert Ornstein and Paul Ehrlich described our evolutionary history. Early humans lived in a world of instant challenges requiring instant reflexes. An animal or enemy surprised our ancestors and they had to respond instantly or die. Eat or be eaten! Over millions of years, humans adapted to the world by focusing on instant life or death changes. Big changes were not crucial to the daily survival challenges.

Today, we must see and solve our systemic, complex and global challenges. As it states in the Bible (Proverbs 29:18), "Where there is no vision, the people perish." We must try to see a sustainable future or perish?

If we are each a cell in what Peter Russell calls "the global brain," then collective visions become absolute necessities. In his book, *The Global Brain Awakens*, he writes, "Billions of messages continually shuttle back and forth, in an ever-growing web of communication, linking the billions of minds of humanity together into a single system." How soon will the global brain achieve some sort of collective vision?

In a 1992 document entitled, *Warning to Humanity*, over 1600 senior scientists, including the majority of the living Nobel laureates in the sciences signed a paper stating: "We, the undersigned senior members

of the world's scientific community, hereby warn all of humanity of what lies ahead. A great change in our stewardship of the earth and the life on it is required, if vast human misery is to be avoided and our global home on this planet is not to be irretrievably mutilated."*

Our planet today has a rising population faced with dwindling resources and the global community has become so interconnected that there is simply no place that is not affected by the ecology of the whole. Common sense alone would inform us that we need to shift from a vision of growth to a collective vision of stewardship of the earth and the life on it in order to achieve a sustainable quality of life.

In the Bible, a steward was a "manager"—someone who acts as the caretaker of resources that belong to another. The biblical view is that every one of us is, by creation, essentially a steward of gifts which actually come from God.

Spending time in the natural world is important for us to see the gifts of life. Nature helps us to understand stewardship. In nature we become aware of the ecology of the whole—the interdependencies of the living systems that make up our lives. Nature helps us to see and feel the need for personal and collective stewardship.

Aristotle wrote, "The soul never thinks without a picture." Vision has to do with our courage to anticipate and picture what can be a better future. Intuition is the heart of picturing. Intuition is organic and evolving. As we grow and mature, our intuition can become deeper, broader and wiser.

We are inspired on our African safaris by the natural, quiet, reflective environment of natural beauty, which encourages intuition and deep dialogue. Nature provides beauty and space for inspiration. It holds the mystery of our own human nature.

As we have journeyed together, we have deepened our dialogues around safari campfires at night. We have silenced our inner critics. Our voices used to say, "Don't do anything that will upset our guests." But that isn't our view anymore! We can't hold back for fear of being labeled "impractical visionaries." We must speak from the heart: "This is what's critical and why. This is our vision."

Around the campfire we talk of the trends indicating that the growth era is on a collision course with nature. The global environmental challenge is

pressured by social, economic and spiritual challenges that are equally of concern. African history shows us where our current path may lead us. The struggle between the long-term, immediate survival solutions are mirrors of our challenges in the larger world.

We look at the bigger picture and ask: "How are we doing in Africa—specifically Tanzania—today? If we go back 10 years and compare with the situation today, what are the trends?"

"Do we have fewer people in poverty, or at least a smaller percentage of the population? Are famine years less frequent and less harsh?"

"Are there fewer or greater numbers of people vulnerable to famine and epidemics? Are there improved basic services—clean water, health, education?"

"As a whole are we progressing, regressing or standing still?"

The answers are clear and unequivocal. And, the trends are both frightening and challenging.

Many, if not most, of the numerous cultures in Africa do not have a written history. But they all have an oral history, or oral tradition. To clarify the issues and begin our vision quest for a way forward, it may be helpful to go back and listen to these oral traditions. The Hadza and Dorobo hunter-gatherer tribes, for example, do not have records of famine. Why in their oral tradition don't they have records of famine? Here are several reasons: They rely on numerous and diverse food sources; all food sources are adapted to the environment; they are mobile, able to exploit seasonal abundance of diverse food sources; they don't store food; they share all food among their communities; and their mobility precludes the accumulation of many possessions and precludes frequent births.

Why, on the other hand, have the many groups surrounding the Hadza and Dorobo—pastoralists and agriculturists—recorded famine? The Iraqw, Sukuma, Isanzu, Iramba and Barabaig tribes all have records of famine. They are more vulnerable because they are not adapted to the environment.

Obviously, we can't nor do we want to go back to living as hunter-gatherers. But, this is where we as a species spent most of our history. We can't go back,

yet, we can't afford to deny the lessons learned from our past. What are the lessons?

First, we human beings are a part of nature rather than apart from nature. Ultimately, whether we live in a mud and wattle house in a village or in a flat in New York, we, along with all the other life forms of God's great creation, depend on the earth and the processes by which it functions.

Second, the earth and nature's resources are finite. We must rediscover the vision of natural limits. We must work within the limits of resource potential. The more we work with, rather than against, nature's ecological processes, the greater chance we have for a truly sustainable world. Growth is not by definition

progress or development. In fact, it can be the converse.

Third, cultures which are hunter-gatherers are often viewed as backward due to their lack of understanding of lifestyles, which are sophisticated adaptations for resource exploitation. Yet, they have wisdom. They have adapted to their environment. They have much to teach us about living in community and about "how much is enough" in a world of abundance.

Fourth, there are incredible population pressures on nature's life support systems on which we depend. These pressures are the root cause of many of the ills besetting Africa and other parts of the world. Take a look at these figures:

Global Population Growth

200,000 years ago (doubling in 190,000 years)	10,000
10,000 BC (doubling in 5,000 years)	10,000,000
5,000 BC	20,000,000
3,000 BC	50,000,000
1400 BC	100,000,000
0	200,000,000
1200 AD (doubling in 500 years)	400,000,000
1700 AD	800,000,000
1900 AD	1,500,000,000
1960 AD (doubling in 40 years)	3,000,000,000
1998 AD	6,000,000,000

In Tanzania, the figures are staggering:

1950	8,000,000
1998	32,000,000
2020 (projected)	60,000,000

Population growth is driven by many forces. One of the major forces is that 99.9% of cultures today are growing on the basis of belief systems derived from a "frontier mentality"—a mentality which denies finite natural limits and envisions unlimited economic growth.

What do these lessons mean for us as individuals and what can we do collectively in community? Start simply with a one hour vision quest! Take an hour out of your busy life and anticipate and picture your future. Picture yourself sitting around a quiet, crackling campfire in the deep bush of Africa. Lions are roaring back and forth in the distance. Hyenas are curiously prowling the perimeters of the campsite (at a safe distance!). Occasional baboon grunts and howls are heard from the rocks overhead as they settle in for a safe night's rest. What are your present relationships with the natural world and other life forms? How do you fit in? What is your purpose in life? Who are you from an earth stewardship point of view? What do you care deeply about? What values are essential to you? For your work? Your family? Your community? Your planet? How are your values reflected in your day-to-day, moment-to-moment lifestyle? Where is the future of the planet headed and what is your personal stand on that future? What does stewardship mean to you?

If Proverbs 29:18 is true in saying, "Where there is no vision, the people perish," there are incredible parallels between the challenges in ancient times and today. These kinds of challenges have been with us from the earliest times. Without steward leadership, the threat of perishing is always possible. In his book *Leadership Jazz*, Max DePree suggests that preparing for true leadership "consists of wandering in the desert." His metaphor of wandering in the desert requires that we must cultivate the ability to discern wisdom from within ourselves.

If we see ourselves in a transition period between an era of growth and one of stewardship we must wander in the desert. We must summon new visions and the courage to articulate them persuasively. Whether it be around campfires, or in our churches, organizations and communities, we must each take our stand individually and collectively.

We need to renew the practice of the vision quest. Like the courage evidenced in the bicentennial epic explorations of Lewis and Clark (1804-1806), we need a renewed passion for pushing into the unknown. Their inability to predict what was out there was actually a motivation for going out there.

Living in the question of uncertainty was part of the payoff, not one of the obstacles.

All vision quests have one thing in common, courage. We must seek something we cannot predict with certainty. We must go somewhere we're not sure we can go. "Probing the edges of what might be possible," in the words of Reinhold Messner, one of the greatest mountaineers of all time, is essential to keep us from perishing.

*Quoted in James George, *Asking for the Earth* (Element Books, 1995).

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Dick and David have also helped found The Dorobo Fund for Tanzania, a non-profit fund to help with stewardship-based education and conservation visions.

At the Edge of a Revolution

by Craig Neal

The relationship between work and the human spirit has struck a chord with many people at all levels of the business world.

Spirituality in business? The seeming incongruity of it is part of its appeal. A movement is definitely building. Perhaps, even, a revolution. Anyone with something to add is no longer a voice crying in the wilderness.

Spirituality is an agenda item on many leadership workshops and conferences. Workshops that would have been conducted quietly at the departmental level only two to five years ago are now being promoted company-wide. CEOs have gone public,

revealing a commitment to human values that extends far beyond the bottom line.

William George, chairman of Medtronic, a leading medical devices company, describes his job as increasing and extending “the vitality of our organization’s soul.” He sees the corporation as a partner in the lives of employees. Symbols of Medtronic’s support of individual needs are its meditation room and a library filled with artifacts and materials representing the world’s religions. The environment encourages employees at Medtronic to feel comfortable applying their personal values to their work.

Some executives have sought like-minded colleagues in peer-group exchanges they have established at universities. Tom Chappell, of Tom’s of Maine, even took a two-year leave to attend Harvard Divinity School, and returned to his company less “obsessed” by bottom line figures and more interested in motivating workers and producing better products.

Things are changing—fast! Words like “spirit,” “heart,” “soul,” “values” and “purpose” are used often nowadays in business life.

We are in the midst of values shift as many industrial era practices prepare to fall. We are experiencing the beginning of a transformation in our work lives. This is not the latest fad, as some people would like to think, but a genuine recognition that the workplace has a crucial role to play in the satisfaction of a vital human need—the need for fulfillment and integration.

We are witnessing the convergence of two major social movements—one in the culture at large and one in business—both of which are beginning to have a profound influence on the workplace.

We are experiencing a spiritual renaissance. Interest in religion is on the rise across the country. Ninety-six percent of people of all faiths profess a belief in God or a Universal Spirit. Sixty-two percent of Americans say that religion has a growing influence in their lives. Tens of millions of

people are active with 12-step programs in which trust in a higher power plays a significant role.

Furthermore, there has been a trend toward personal spirituality, with individuals turning inward for guidance, listening for intuitive wisdom, perhaps through the practice of meditation or prayer, and accepting individual responsibility for serving the collective good. These spiritual seekers, or “cultural creatives,” comprise nearly one-fourth of American adults, or 44 million persons, according to studies done by Paul H. Ray at the Stanford Research Institute.

Millions of cultural creatives have taken active steps to make changes in their personal lives—improving relationships with family, reducing materialism, letting go of dependencies, living their faith, listening to their inner selves, seeking balance in their lives, making choices about what matters most.

These people represent a diverse, major, yet still largely latent force in the workplace. They can’t (and won’t) drop these beneficial values at the door as they enter the workplace. They will work to transform the workplace as they have transformed themselves. This is a powerful force for change that business is beginning to recognize.

Employees at The St. Paul Companies began a grassroots initiative, which came out of people’s desire to bring their personal lives together with their work lives. The effort resulted in an ongoing series of explorations called the Inner Work Group. At the World Bank in Washington, D.C., hundreds of employees of varied cultural backgrounds have been getting together informally to discuss their beliefs and values, eventually forming the “Spiritual Empowerment Society,” an effort inspired by Richard Barrett, Director of Transportation there at the time, who went on to become the organization’s Values Coordinator.

Similarly, in Houston, Texas, Steve Davee, Vice President of Human Resources at Exxon, instituted spirituality-in-the-workplace programs involving

employees. We are beginning to see the personal transformation movement affect the workplace.

The second important development influencing the workplace is the corporate social responsibility movement, which over the past two decades has encouraged corporations to play a role in improving their communities. Social responsibility calls upon companies to use their power, contribution dollars and employees to take stands on important social issues in an attempt to affect change in the community.

These two powerful movements have been operating thus far on parallel but separate tracks.

Fusion of these two forces—a spiritual renaissance and corporate social responsibility—is spawning the emerging, revolutionary movement some call “conscious business.”

Conscious business builds on, but goes beyond, corporate social responsibility. It encompasses values-centered, spirit-infused ideas to improve the business environment. It inspires efforts to have business take on more responsibility for nurturing the human soul.

We have seen business and personal lives as separate. The conscious business movement is bringing the two together. It is connecting personal transformation with organizational transformation. It aligns the best interests of companies with the spirits of employees. It is focused on making the workplace one in which the highest purpose and values of both company and employees are upheld.

In modern business life we’ve been suffering from “legitimized schizophrenia”—that uneasy feeling of putting on a “mask,” of playing the “game,” of donning the “suit”—to do what one seems to have to do to be successful. We have tended to accept this artificial separation between work and life. Burnout, stress and spiritual fatigue are among the results.

People are just plain tired of living disconnected lives. They are yearning for integration. They want

to bring together the personal, the professional, the social and the spiritual sides of themselves into one whole human being. Many people are asking “Where did I get off the track?” They are looking for road signs for help.

Businesses today are experiencing considerable internal turmoil as well, despite outward signs of success. In our new, service-oriented economy, in which the major assets are human knowledge, service and creativity, corporations are held to a higher level of accountability. The bottom line is more than numbers. Only sustainable human organizations can thrive in the long run. Those are organizations that are looking out for their human assets and their long-term impact on society as well as their hard assets and financial returns.

As individuals are seeking fulfillment and integration, organizations, too, are struggling with two critical leadership issues: how to retain their best people and how to improve productivity. In the emerging environment, the “best” people are those who are “healthy,” meaning balanced in body, mind and spirit. They live balanced lives. They have deep energy and commitment.

Enlightened companies that are aware of the dichotomy between personal and professional lives see that their best people might go off on their own, become entrepreneurs and develop startups. They see that the new crop of Generation Xers is coming in with a “free-agent” mentality, unencumbered by the loyalties of a bygone era. These companies are focusing on strengthening their cultures so that they can create meaning for their employees.

There have been considerable changes also in the science of leadership, which now embraces such new concepts as chaos theory and self-organizing systems, as written about by Margaret Wheatley in *Leadership and the New Science*. Chaos theory comes directly out of physics and self-organizing systems come directly out of biology. Both are now finding their way into business and leadership theory. This marriage is another instance where business and other cultural and scientific insights are becoming more integrated.

Business is beginning to recognize that for its own survival it must create workplaces that are integrated environments. The workplace is emerging as the delivery system both for the integration of values people want to incorporate into their lives and the sustainability organizations need to create value for their customers and communities.

Since the Industrial Revolution, we have created a very well oiled, efficiently run, elegant combination of systems and technology, which at their essence are now able to deliver vast quantities of information and intelligence and wisdom instantaneously on a planetary level to every corner of the earth. That is the delivery system at our disposal.

What is put into that delivery system is up to us. We all know how it works: garbage in, garbage out. If we keep putting in outdated, exploitive, extractive methodologies into that delivery system, we are going to keep getting more levels of destruction and degradation of our quality of life out. However, if we start putting wise information into that delivery system, the chances are that things will start working. And, regardless of where we are in the delivery system, we can help shift the information that flows through it.

Our new technologies can indeed save and actually elevate our quality of life. That's the bottom line.

The course that was set in motion with the Industrial Revolution has led us to global interconnectedness. We are now becoming aware of the subtle yet crucial interdependent web of all life and all life's systems. Business is part of that. It does not function outside of it. We know now that our institutions have to work together. The globe is getting smaller and smaller.

Modern business practices are influencing every community on the planet, including the most geographically remote. Technological advances have been accepted as basic necessities in most cultures. Business and commerce are the commodities through which we communicate.

People are driving the change. Business will transform because people will transform.

Many of us are so poised for change that only a slight, but crucial, shift in confidence and courage is needed to transform our workplaces.

The transformation shift is simultaneous. It occurs when people realize they can live integrated lives in the workplace and when business decides it can be successful and operate on life sustaining principles. CEOs at Medtronic, Monsanto, Aveda, Interface Carpet and many others are setting the tone in their companies. These are the seeds of a movement that is beginning to gain momentum.

The conscious business movement is a genuine next step in the evolution of business as a leading institution in our society. Some of our major institutions—religion, social agencies and government—have been the guardians of our human values. What is beginning to be asked now is that business interests come together to form a similar guardianship.

We are closer to a shift from the status quo than many of us realize. The infrastructure for a revolution in our businesses and institutions is in place. Millions of valuable employees and leaders have undergone significant personal transformation and are ready to bring their whole selves into the workplace. Many companies are aware of the need for radical change in their work environments if they are to attract and retain and motivate the creative and productive employees that are needed to compete successfully in the 21st century, knowledge-based economy.

Many leaders have already learned that they can hold on to their core values and fulfill their social commitments while being successful in material terms. Companies have demonstrated that they can indeed do well by doing good, and that they can do so, not just out of guilt, but because they see genuine business opportunities.

With all these elements in place, only small shifts are needed to ignite a genuine workplace revolution

and transform our dreams of fulfilled, integrated human beings working in profitable organizations into current realities.

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Why Do You Get Up In The Morning?

by Richard Leider

Why do some people approach their work with energy and commitment, while others question why they are getting up in the morning?

A sense of purpose and a clear answer to the question, “Why do you get up in the morning?” makes the difference. You can observe people’s answer on four levels of work expectations:

1. It’s just a job—any job is okay as long as the money is good and I can do my thing after work.
2. It’s a permanent job—my work is regular and I get benefits, vacations and security.
3. It’s a profession or trade—I have substance in my work. I can grow my talents, move up and be challenged.
4. It’s a vocation or calling—my work is a way to use my gifts to make a difference doing something I believe needs doing in the world.

On which level do you operate at work? Do you generally feel energized to get up in the morning to go to work? You can get a sense by circling the questions below to which you would answer YES!

A Working On Purpose Questionnaire*

1. Do I wake up most Monday mornings feeling energized to go to work?
2. Do I have deep energy—feel a personal calling—for my work?
3. Am I clear about how I measure my success as a person?
4. Do I use my gifts to add real value to people’s lives?
5. Do I work with people who honor the values I value?
6. Can I speak my truth in my work?
7. Am I experiencing true joy in my work?
8. Am I making a living doing what I most love to do?
9. Can I speak my purpose in one clear sentence?
10. Do I go to sleep most nights feeling “this was a well-lived day”?

The more items you circled, the higher the level of energy at which you approach your work. When we’re working on purpose, we have more deep energy, commitment and true reason to get up in the morning.

Use this questionnaire to discuss with other people (colleagues, spouse, friends) the meaning in their life and work.

*A Working On Purpose Questionnaire comes from
*The Power of Purpose: Creating Meaning in Your
Life and Work* by Richard Leider (Berrett-Koehler,
1997)

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