

Visionary Leadership

Creating and Implementing a Vision For the School

By Edward W. Chance and Marilyn L. Grady

Administrators, confronted by complex tasks, economic restrictions, and community concerns, need clear visions to guide their schools and staffs toward effective learning. How can they clarify and develop vision?

Visionary leadership is a prominent trait of high performing administrators.

The U.S. Department of Education's *Principal Selection Guide* (1987), states that "effective school leaders have broad visions that are clear, active, ambitious, and performance-oriented." The *Guide* further notes that effective administrators "create conditions to help them realize the visions." Vision is the force, the dream toward which effective administrators strive in shaping their individual schools for success.

Definitions of vision vary. Manasse (1985) describes

Edward W. Chance is professor of education at the University of Oklahoma, Norman. Marilyn L. Grady is a professor of education at the University of

vision as “the development, trans-
mission, and implementation of a
desirable future.” Batsis (1987)
identified vision as more compre-
hensive than goals and objectives.
Shieve and Shoenheit (1987) indi-
cated that “A vision is a blueprint of
a desired state. It is an image of a
preferred condition that we work to
achieve in the future.”

In a study of eight highly effective
principals, Blumberg and Greenfield
(1980) found that those principals
who had vision created an environ-
ment in which their personal values
provided a foundation for the school.
Manasse (1982) indicated that effec-

tive administrators have visions of
schools that reflect established and
entrenched publicly articulated val-
ues. These values were discussed
and explained within the education-
al community.

Grady and LeSourd (1988, 1989)
identify five dominant qualities of a
leader with vision. Leaders with
vision:

- Are guided and motivated by per-
sonal values
- Have an intense commitment to
the achievement of goals that
they identified as important for
their organizations
- Develop a sense of common pur-

Figure 1
Considerations in Developing a Personal Vision

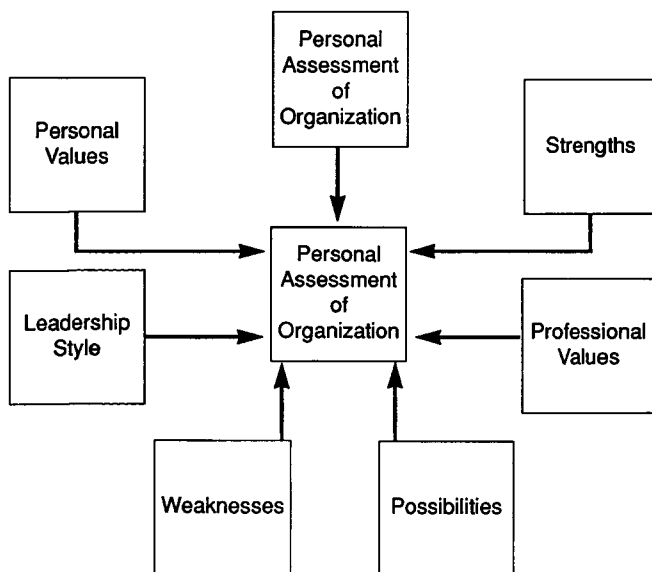
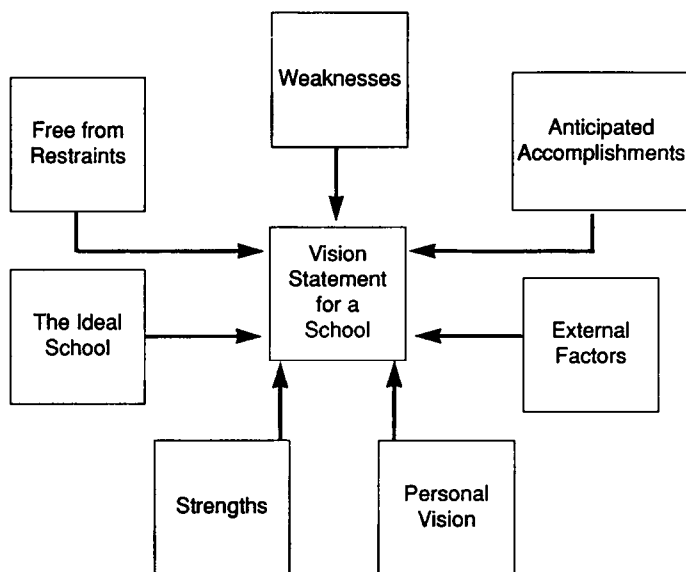


Figure 2

Considerations in Developing a Vision for a School



pose and direction among all members of their organizations

- Are organizational innovators
- Consistently focus on a future that represents something better.

However one defines vision, it is intangible yet essential because it provides direction for an organization. Vision is a powerful force that guides, cajoles, directs, and facilitates accomplishment.

Why Is Vision Important?

A crucial aspect of leadership is the development of a vision that not only calls for excellence but estab-

lishes an educational environment and culture in which this can be achieved. Administrators must be willing to ask the questions, "What are we doing? Is it working? Can be done better?" and then listen to the answers. Administrators who are leaders must be able to model and articulate their visions while striving to actualize the organization they envision.

A vision unifies a school and increases the emotional support of those in the organization (Litt and Fried, 1988). Individuals within such an organization work together to achieve the vision and believe

their daily contributions are important in realizing the vision.

Vision guides the school's administrators, faculty, students, and support staff. Because expectations, goals, and purposes are clear, vision helps establish the climate for the school.

How To Clarify/Develop a Vision

Vision begins within the individual; it originates as a personal concept and reflects personal values, personal assessment of the organization, personal views of possibilities, and professional values. In developing a personal vision, administrators might ask the following self-assessment questions:

- What are my five greatest strengths?

- What are my five greatest weaknesses?
- What are three things I value most in my professional life?
- With which leadership style am I most comfortable?
- What are the most important things I want to accomplish in this school?
- How would I like to be remembered as an administrator?
- What do I want to prove as a leader?

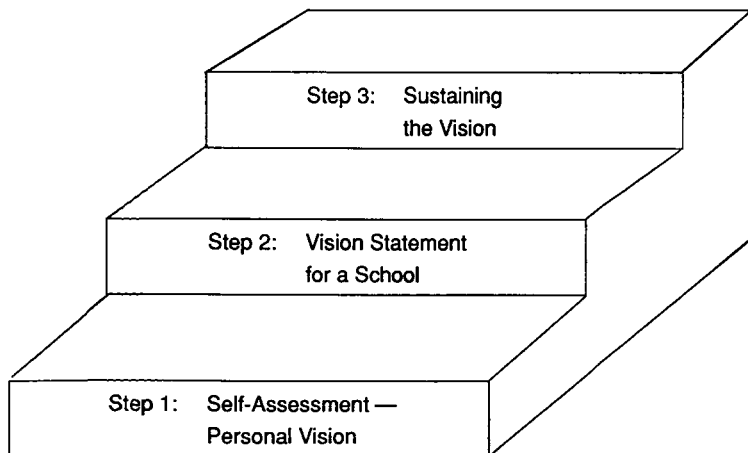
Once these questions are answered, they can begin to formulate or clarify their vision. Figure 1 illustrates important considerations in developing a personal vision.

A Vision for the School

A second step in developing and

Figure 3

Steps in Developing Vision and Sustaining a Vision for a School



implementing vision is establishing a vision statement for the school. This is developed in much the same manner as the personal vision. Some of the questions that can be asked are:

- What are the strengths of this school?
- What are its weaknesses?
- What external factors help or hinder the proper functioning of this school?
- What is the existing relationship between the various components of the school?

Additional useful questions identified by Kouzes and Posner (1987) are:

- How would you like to change the world for yourself and your organization?
- If you could invent the future, what future would you invent for yourself and your organization?
- What does your ideal organization look like?

After answering these questions, knowledge of the organization can be used to facilitate the implementation of the vision statement. Next, long-term and short-term priorities should be identified and other organization members involved in clarifying the vision. Implementing the vision and identifying areas of responsibility are next. The leader's personal vision must be evident as a guiding force. Figure 2 presents issues to be considered in develop-

ing a vision for the school.

Sustaining the Vision

Shieve and Shoenheit (1987) identified five distinct steps for attaining a vision: see it, own it, make this personal vision a public/organizational one, develop strategies to achieve it, and begin acting on the vision. Involvement of others, selling the vision through effective communication, and utilizing resources wisely all facilitate implementation of the vision.

Effective administrators allocate funding, materials, and time in pursuit of the vision and systematically and judiciously utilize instructional management strategies, advantageous scheduling, recognition, and rewards to achieve the vision. Effective visionary leaders constantly pursue a school climate that enhances learning and advances teacher productivity.

Communication of the vision is crucial. Others must know what the vision is and be able to articulate and publicize the vision in their own way. The vision should be communicated to everyone associated with the school.

Administrators with vision engage their staffs in decision making and problem solving to shape organizational activities, teacher performance, and student behavior and learning. This staff involvement n

only builds collegiality but exhibits what has been deemed organizationally important.

Challenges for School Leaders (AASA, 1988), identifies two important aspects that not only facilitate the implementation but assist in sustaining the vision.

The first aspect is to free administrators periodically from daily tasks to attend meaningful workshops or conferences, or to visit other schools that have been identified as effective.

The second suggestion is to allow the administrative staff to spend time in the summer on strategic planning. This planning could focus on how far the organization has progressed and how the school can continue to move toward the fulfillment of the vision.

If the vision is to be sustained, there must be an opportunity for renewal and an evaluation of programmatic approaches. Figure 3 presents a model that includes the components that are critical to developing and sustaining a school's vision.

Conclusion

Effective administrators who are instructional leaders and utilize shared decision-making and team-building activities possess vision. Successful administrators are more than officers; they are leaders. They

understand that without direction and purpose, school programs, facilities, and morale will deteriorate. To prevent this, administrators must set priorities and goals, involve others in decision making, continue their professional growth, and provide impetus and guidance to the school. They must also, as Barth (1988) states, believe in teachers, attribute much success to them, and not be afraid to admit that an administrator may not know everything and may need assistance. Simply put, the successful, effective administrator must develop, implement, and sustain the vision of not what the school *should* be but what the school *will* be.

The creation and development of a vision for the school should be an administrator's first priority. Vision provides only the destination. When a visionary leader collaborates with the stakeholders of the school, the trip can be an exciting and rewarding one.

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Reading and Writing in the Schools

The results of the National Center for Education Statistics' National Assessment Report reveal that:

- High school females have higher reading and writing proficiencies than males
- Students attending schools in advantaged urban areas performed considerably better than those attending school in disadvantaged

urban areas

- Students in the Southeast performed less well than those in the Northeast, West, and Central regions
- Home attention to literacy, including more reading materials in the home and higher levels of parental education, was positively related to proficiency.