

Can You Picture That?

*Creative imaging is not the exclusive gift of prophets and pundits.
You can learn to do it, too.*

Creative imaging is a powerful tool for bringing about organizational change. It can best be described as visualizing a plan for change and improvement, and then making it happen.

In one sense, imaging is a way of communicating with oneself in order to influence one's life.

For centuries, people have been quietly using imaging in some form for healing, sports excellence, and interpersonal relations. But the specific ability to envision and then materialize an idea or goal has been traditionally treated as a gift belonging to a few extraordinary leaders and visionaries.

Imaging may come naturally to some people, but this extraordinary ability can be learned. It takes simple, but specific, techniques.

Creative imaging for change follows this recipe:

- Identify a specific need for change.
- Envision a better way.
- Formulate a vision-based plan of action.

Identify a need for change

Imagine that your work organization is transformed by a shared vision. Daily routines rise from drudgery and take on new meaning.

Consider the story of three brick masons who were each asked what they were building. The first answered, "I'm laying bricks." The second replied, "I'm building a wall."

Hall teaches courses in communication at the University of Minnesota and at the Colleges of St. Thomas and St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minnesota, and is a communication trainer at 5042 Queen Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55410.

By Lea Hall

The third said, "I'm building a cathedral!" That is what creative imaging can do.

What do you answer when someone at work asks what you are doing? If you're a teacher, you might say, "I'm grading papers." Or you might answer, "I'm teaching organizational communication." You could say, "I'm shaping peoples' consciousness!"

How can we learn to take the larger view? What can we do to activate our own imaging power? The first step is to identify a specific need for change.

Envision a better way

The second step, envisioning a better way, has been demonstrated by most charismatic leaders. Almost anyone can learn to use certain simple

- What did you do with it?

Now that your image-making mind is beginning to warm up, start thinking about an organization. Think of one of the organizations you have been part of lately, and imagine that you are approaching it some time in the future. You imagine that over time many things have changed for the better.

Picture yourself approaching the entrance to the building. You are comfortable and relaxed. Enter and see the people who are there. Notice that everything feels different, better than it used to. You are no longer attached to the organization in your previous role, and you are in a position to see and understand how things have changed for the better. Move around in your imagination to different areas and see how they too have changed for the better.

Creative imaging is a powerful tool for organizational change

techniques for creative visualization. A simple exercise can help you prepare to apply such techniques to the workplace. The exercise begins by warming up your powers of visualizing.

Think back to your own childhood, to a moment when you created something.

- What was it that you created?
- What did it look like?
- What was it made of?
- How did it feel in your hands?
- Was anyone else present?

Recall what part you played in bringing these changes about. Enjoy your sense of accomplishment. Now imagine yourself leaving this organization again, perhaps for the day, perhaps forever. Say goodbye in whatever way seems appropriate and imagine yourself walking freely out the door, pleased with what you have seen. Once the vision exists, appropriate actions can follow.

As Chrysler Chairman Lee Iacocca once proclaimed to employees, "We can do it! Consider it done!"

Formulate a vision-based plan of action

The third step consists of formulating a vision-based plan of action. You may want to consider what implications your vision holds for your organization and for your behavior within the organization. Consider which parts of the vision are attainable. How might your vision come to be? If you were going to be part of the change, what would be your first step? As you ponder the possibilities, keep in mind the following quotation:

"A vision without a task is but a dream; a task without a vision is drudgery; a vision and a task is the hope of the world." (Anonymous, 1730.)

Combining vision and task is as simple as following the recipe already provided: Identify a need for change, envision a better way, and work from a vision-based plan of action.

One of the most powerful tools a "change master" can use is the shared vision

Vision-making in the real world

How realistic is vision-making? Organizational theorists have been keeping an eye on the business of vision-making for some time. For example, let's take a look at the discoveries of an expert on how creative visions can make a difference. In *The Change Masters*, Rosabeth Moss Kanter documents the connection between leadership and large visions, which are the products of many imaginations.

Kanter particularly cites the positive effect of innovation on productivity. She claims that strategic planning must include the use of intuitive image crafting in the context of organizational resources. Kanter proposes that the overuse of rational, analytic techniques—such as budgets and reports, quantitative measures, and market analyses—may stifle innovation. Although these techniques are necessary and important, a leap of imagination is also required.

According to Kanter, one of the

most powerful tools a "change master" can use is the shared vision. Kanter's true change masters learn to ask questions, rather than assuming answers, and are open to possibilities. Flexible, responsive people are necessary in order to foster change.

Where has this happened? Kanter describes three cases of dramatic organizational turnarounds. Each case involves a shift from an old economic model to a newer one that embraces change and innovation. In each case, the three steps of the creative imaging recipe were key to the transformation, and the necessary tools were already in place.

Case 1. "Chipco," an assembly plant of a large manufacturing company, developed a way to empower its grass-roots workers and supervisors.

One entrepreneurial middle manager envisioned solving production

problems using the production people themselves. That vision ran counter to the company's prevailing assumptions about the capabilities of production people, whom managers sometimes referred to as "animals."

The visionary middle manager had to really sell her idea, gather resources and support, and launch the project. She succeeded so completely that all of the shop-floor workers voluntarily joined teams to redesign the production process. By identifying, imaging, and planning, the manager and the teams created a better way, in this case a new system that improved efficiency and employee satisfaction. They also left in place a forum for employees at every level of the plant to participate in managing change.

Case 2. One company that has fostered visions is General Motors. At its plant in Tarrytown, New York, a vision for a better quality of worklife for employees transformed the company from a monument to management/labor conflict to what *Business Week* called the instigator of "a new era" in

American industrial relations.

At General Motors' Fleetwood plant in Detroit, employee participation groups replaced discontent with teamwork.

In each case, a top manager turned around a plant on the verge of closing. Obvious problems were identified; visions of participative management were formed; and plans of action quickly yielded higher quality work, lower absenteeism, and fewer grievances.

Case 3. At 3M in Minnesota, Chairman Allen Jacobson understands the need for a vision in the innovation process. Known as a "hothouse of innovation," 3M identified a need in the early 1980s to reduce costs in order to compete with foreign imports. Rather than cut back on research and development—often where visions are fostered—3M's management relied on R&D to improve manufacturing efficiency.

In 1985, the company instituted a program designed to reduce labor costs, manufacturing time, and waste from returned or rejected goods—each by 35 percent. By 1988, 3M's best profit margin since 1980 testified to the success of the program.

The vision of efficiency was based on a thorough understanding of how each product was made and on employee teamwork. It successfully effected organizational change in a company of 83,000 people.

Not just for the Fortune 500

Visions are also critical to the survival of small businesses. With the help of imaging, a Philadelphia speech pathologist, Marilyn Nyman, developed a private practice in speech rehabilitation from a part-time job. Nyman went from operating out of her home to leading a diversified company with 15 employees, now based in a corporate business center.

At each stage of development in her business, Nyman actively visualized her next direction. At each stage—whether it was expanding her clientele base, shifting services, or repositioning management priorities—the process was the same. She identified a need for growth, envisioned the new dimension, and planned how to implement the new piece in a practical way.

Nonprofit organizations can also

use imaging. Compatible technology Institute, for example, envisioned people in India becoming more self-sufficient and better nourished by using untapped resources. CTI's plan led to making nutritional high-protein cookies from soybean by-products that were traditionally discarded. CTI also introduced a process for compressing vegetable by-products into briquettes for household fuel, and set up cloth-weaving centers in leper colonies.

Activist Lois Barber envisioned a way in which concerned but busy citizens could donate time to work for nuclear disarmament. Barber's vision and plan resulted in an information service, 20/20 Vision, to which subscribers pay \$20 a year and 20 minutes a month to lobby for their cause.

New possibilities

Suppose you are a manager and your organization needs visions. You might begin by asking yourself and your employees the following questions:

- What do you find most difficult about your job?
- What don't you understand about your job?
- What would help you do your work better?
- What would you like to see changed?

The answers to those questions can initiate the vision process and later ground your vision in specific actions.

The vision process develops out of a common ground. Human beings, possessing imagination and language, can initiate change and can articulate and shape the process of that change by communicating with others. The vision process is simple; it can be learned and applied to virtually any aspect of our lives.

Consider the act of creative imaging as a way of describing to yourself your past, your present, and your future. Look on the act of describing as a creative and constructive endeavor.

In work, we often relate what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen. We tell stories, in effect. In this way, we create and maintain the meaning we find in our work and our organizations. In the process, what we imagine becomes real and visible. By actually shaping these stories through creative imaging, we open the door to new possibilities. ■

NEW!



Nancy J. Friedman

Customer Service Training Video from The Telephone "Doctor"®

"How To Handle The Irate Caller"

No one enjoys receiving a barrage of complaints from unhappy customers, but for many people it's a routine part of their day. In the customer service field it sometimes "comes with the territory." Finally, a comprehensive training video that reveals tips and ideas on how to handle the irate, angry, rude, and sometimes abrasive caller.

Included are the Telephone "Doctor" ASAP techniques plus why it's *never* a good idea to make excuses; and what to do if a customer starts swearing. This video is intended for anyone who handles complaint calls and contains practical and common sense methods to show the caller you're on their side and you're there to help.

Rent this 10 minute program for 3 days . . .

ONLY \$49⁰⁰ Includes Leader's Guide
Purchase Price is *295* (Yes, Rental Applies to Purchase!)



The Telephone "Doctor"
12119 St. Charles Rock Road
St. Louis, MO 63044
1-800-882-9911 • 314-291-1012
FAX 314-291-3226

Circle No. 153 on Reader Service Card

PREVIEW THIS PROGRAM

FREE!

Ask for the T&D Journal special offer



No Train, No Gain.

You spend so much time training and developing others, isn't it time you gave yourself the same opportunity? With Zenger-Miller's Professional Development Seminars you'll gain new skills, confidence and effectiveness. Not to mention more influence within your organization.

Arrange a seminar in-house. Or attend one of our public sessions. Topics include Consulting Skills, Facilitation and Advanced Facilitation Skills, Leading Quality Team Meetings and

Measuring Bottom-Line Impact. Each seminar is lively, practical and results-oriented.

To find out more about advancing your own development, call Roy Blitzer at (408) 452-1244. You have nothing to lose. And everything to gain.

Professional Development Center™

ZENGER MILLER

1735 Technology Drive, 6th Floor
San Jose, CA 95110-1313

Circle No. 152 on Reader Service Card