

# THE TRANSFORMATION TIMES

A publication of The Transformative Press,  
William Diedrich and Rob Curtner, editors

December 10, 2001

## What is *The Transformation Times*?

The Transformation Times is a monthly publication from [Transformative Leadership Systems](#) and [Robert Curtner - Consultants](#). Our purpose is to provide insightful information about issues and opportunities for leaders, and to engage in dialogue with thoughtful readers. We welcome your comments. [www.transformativepress.com](http://www.transformativepress.com)



**Bill Diedrich** owns [Transformative Leadership Systems](#), a management consulting firm. Bill is an experienced process consultant, speaker, and coach who has served over 60 organizations. His public work-shops include topics such as Leadership, Spirituality, Change, and

Personal Responsibility. Bill is the author of *The Road Home: The Journey Beyond The Spiritual Quick Fix*, available through the above website. E-mail Bill at [Theroadhome@voyager.net](mailto:Theroadhome@voyager.net)



**Rob Curtner** is an independent consultant with 17 years experience with corporate training and OD. Rob developed critical people and leadership skills through his earlier career experience managing human

organizations. Rob's areas of expertise include: Developing Problem Solving Teams, Technical Training System Implementation, Performance Consulting, Developing the Learning Organization, and Facilitation of Training and Organizational Change Activities. He is currently working on a safety initiative with UAW/Daimler-Chrysler and a TPM implementation with Technicolor Video Services. Email Rob at – [curtner.robert@acd.net](mailto:curtner.robert@acd.net)

## **The Power of Aligned Vision**

by William Frank Diedrich

Most organizations have a vision statement these days. We would probably all agree that having a vision is very important. People in an organization

like to know where they are heading. Without clear vision there is confusion, conflicting agendas, and competition between departments. The vision is a desired state. We peer into the future and say: "This is what we will see, hear, and feel at some future time."

Creating a vision statement is necessary in order to focus energy and efforts. It doesn't have to take a long time. As a consultant I have helped many groups to create a vision in less than a day. Creating a vision can be exhilarating. People leave the process feeling focused, motivated, ready to roll.

Creating and holding a vision for an organization is powerful. The moment we lay out the intention our brains send signals to our bodies, preparing them for what needs to be done. We send positive signals to each other. A powerful vision can motivate a group of people to accomplish the impossible. Years ago I played on a basketball team. A very talented team beat us 52 to 16. We struggled as they jumped over us, dribbled around us, and out shot us. In a second game they beat us again. Before our third and final game, one our guys said, "We can beat these guys". We created a vision of being victorious. We created a game strategy to help us achieve the vision. We worked together encouraging and assisting each other. We were all focused on playing together to win. We won by three points! We all played beyond our talents. Victory was sweet that day, because we realized we had accomplished the impossible.

Organizations can accomplish the impossible with the same kind of vision and dedication. It isn't enough to create a vision statement, wrap a frame around it, and hang it on the wall. A vision needs to be shared by everyone in the organization. Senior management must own the vision by being involved in its creation. The leader of the organization may already have a vision, but it is not owned by everyone. People who do not own the vision aren't going to work enthusiastically toward its manifestation.

The vision process needs a facilitator. An internal person with excellent facilitation skills may be used, but they should remain neutral throughout the process. A competent external facilitator is usually the best practice. An external professional will structure a process where leaders can arrive at consensus. First, discussions will be held around the current state of the organization and its market.

*The Transformation Times*, December 10, 2001

William Diedrich (517) 333-0806 and Rob Curtner (517) 332-3490

Fears, opportunities, threats, strengths, and weaknesses are surfaced during this discussion. This kind of discussion gets people out of their individual foxholes and allows them to see the world through the eyes of others. Sales, production, purchasing, administration, all see the world differently. Structured, healthy conversation where differing views and differing agendas are brought out help to enlighten everyone.

Information through interaction is followed by inspiration. The vision statement is an inspired collective direction upon which all agree to embark. Once a vision has agreement, alignment is the next step.

Alignment begins with asking the right questions. All questions are asked in the context of acting as if we have already arrived.

There are several questions:

- ✓ How would leaders behave in this organization?
- ✓ How would leaders treat each other, employees, customers, vendors, and community members?
- ✓ What skills would be needed and how would leaders acquire these skills? (classes, seminars, books, individual coaching, etc.)
- ✓ What personal and organizational targets will each leader set that will contribute to this vision?

The key to achieving a vision is to think, act, speak, and live as if you are already there.

Once leaders are on their way to walking the talk, how do they communicate the vision to the next layer of management? How will it be communicated to employees? Typically, we communicate the vision by telling people. Simply telling people is not going to make it happen. People must see you, as a leader, being the vision. If your vision is to be world class in your field, be a world class leader. Identify behavioral standards that you believe are world class. Offer world class customer service to both internal and external customers.

Once the vision is communicated to employees through verbal, printed, and behavioral means it is time to ask them what they think. How are we already living this vision? Where are we falling short? What do you need from leaders to help you make the vision a reality in your job? What targets can you set and achieve that will help make this vision happen?

A successful vision and manifestation engages everyone in the organization. Everyone plays an important role in the process. A successful vision process can bring new energy and enthusiasm to everyone. It can help to make each person's job and work experience to be meaningful.

Finally, people must be treated as if they are important players in the accomplishment of the vision. **Mental Models** that have us seeing people as an expense must be replaced. Organizational

values and behavioral standards that reinforce the worth and importance of every person can be created and implemented. Organizations that successfully create and live their visions are consistent in both task and relationship practices.

Does your organization have a vision? Are your leaders living it? Are your employees living it? Do people come to work with energy and enthusiasm? If you are a leader, are you the keeper of the vision for your area of influence? Are things changing quickly in your business? Where are you going? What opportunities will you create? What greatness can your organization accomplish?

*"Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it.*

*Boldness has genius, power, and imagination in it.*

*Begin it now."* (Goethe)

Comments or questions for Bill?

Contact: [Theroadhome@voyager.net](mailto:Theroadhome@voyager.net)

---

## Better Conversations Using Mental Models by Rob Curtner

Mental Models are images, assumptions, and beliefs that everyone carries around in their heads. They include strongly held beliefs about self, family members, employing organizations, and the world at large that exist in the subconscious. These mental maps help all of us simplify, organize, and make sense of a complex world. Our days are full of conversations, which are interactions with others. This article is about the value of using the Mental Models concept to improve our conversations at work.

Part of becoming more skilled at conversation is becoming aware of our assumptions. Awareness of assumptions helps us avoid unnecessary effort. We all have had the sudden awareness that an assumption we use is wrong. (e.g. Today is Sunday, not Saturday.) Most people have also had the experience of realizing that a shared view of how something works is based on assumptions that are no longer valid. (Airport Security) These tacit, shared assumptions are sometimes called **Mental Models**. Uncovering **Mental Models**, and using the concept to deepen and clarify meaning in conversations can be a valuable way to improve communication.

**Mental Models** can be seen in our responses to new situations. How we handle new situations is influenced by our ingrained assumptions and generalizations about how things work in our world. They are like a pane of glass framing and subtly distorting our vision. They determine what we "choose" to see by limiting our perception. **Mental Models** are powerful in affecting what we do because they affect what we see.

The value of surfacing, clarifying, testing, and improving our internal representations of the world (**Mental Models**) and understanding how these representations, along with their accompanying implicit assumptions, shape our decisions and actions can be dramatic. Our **Mental Models** limit our perceptions, thinking, and what we believe is possible. When we explode limiting **Mental Models**, we open up to new possibilities and opportunities in our perceptions, assumptions and what we accept as possible. What we tell ourselves creates our reality.

Each of us has contributed to a conflict through our own thinking. We made sweeping generalizations about others that determined what we said and how we behaved. When we examine our **Mental Models**, we are led to see subtle patterns of reasoning which determine our behavior and how these **Mental Models** continually get us into trouble.

A valuable model for dealing successfully with **Mental Models** has been developed by Peter Senge' and his associates. This model is called the **Ladder of Inference**. The ladder is a way to break down the leaps our thinking can take in to a series of steps. By taking the thought process on step at a time, we can understand our own thinking better, explain it to others or question others about each step to achieve clarity or avoid misunderstanding.

#### Steps in the Ladder of Inference

(The first step is at the bottom of the ladder.)

1. Observable Data and Experiences
2. Data I select as Relevant/Important
3. Cultural and Personal Meaning I Add
4. Assumptions I make
5. Conclusions I Draw
6. Beliefs I Adopt about the World
7. Actions I Take

Often the process jumps rapidly from step one or two to step 7.

In a recent class about **Mental Models**, I asked the participants to brainstorm some of the **Mental Models** that they saw at work that limited the organization's success. The examples included:

- *"It does no good to bring problems to management, they won't listen. It just makes me look bad, so I keep quiet."*
- *"When supervisors resist change, we are protecting our people from problems."*
- *It is OK to stay angry at work, because I can avoid a lot of useless conversations with people I don't want to talk to."*

Each of these examples is based on some past experiences. A person takes their thinking and

action up the ladder of inference unless they have a conversation which can get at the pattern and offer a new choice.

#### When to Use the Ladder

- When we notice ourselves jumping to conclusions
- When you hear someone advocating a position without making their reasoning clear
- When you *fear that "group-think"* may be occurring in the team's conversation

#### Benefits of the Ladder

- Helps you *check your assumptions*
- Helps you become more aware of your *own thinking and reasoning*
- Prompts you to *make your reasoning clear to others*
- Helps you *inquire* into the thinking and reasoning of others

Too often when confronted with a problem we "*speed listen*" and assume this problem is the same as one we encountered before. This leads to a limited range of possible solutions! Try asking, "*What assumptions am I making about this situation that may limit my deeper understanding of the problem?*" The Ladder of Inference helps prevent jumping to conclusions by reviewing the logic that produces conclusions, revealing gaps in reasoning. Ladder provides a tool to ask questions without embarrassment. The Ladder is a tool that permits mutual inquiry into each others' thinking without being rude. For example, you can ask, "*Can you lead me through the steps which led you to that conclusion?*" Rather than rudely asking, "*Are you sure you know what you're talking about?*"

---

**Transformative Leadership Systems & Robert Curtner - Consultants are pleased to be associated with:**



Some of the most experienced, sought-after independent consultants and agencies in Michigan have joined forces to form **Collective Minds**. Working together as **Collective Minds**, we can create greater bandwidth by pooling our talents and sharing resources more efficiently to serve a broader range and size of projects. See for yourself at -- [www.collectiveminds.ws](http://www.collectiveminds.ws)

---

***The Transformation Times***, December 10, 2001

William Diedrich (517) 333-0806 and Rob Curtner (517) 332-3490