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Vision, Purpose and Design

EVERY YOUNG PERSON who seeks and hopes for the best in life must have vision, make a design, and pursue a purpose. These are requirements beyond dispute. They form the dynamics of achievement.

There is nothing more important to a young man or a young woman than finding the answer to the question: What am I going to make of my life? Shallow thinking will not do. One's life is of great consequence and must be looked at with intelligence, anticipated with imagination, designed with care, and lived with ardour.

It is vital for a youth to ascertain what possibilities he has in him for making the most of himself in achievement and happiness, throughout his years. The procedure might be pictured in this way:

VISION . . . what is the best that is desirable for me?

PURPOSE . . . have I developed the sense of purpose to enable me to attain it?

DESIGN . . . Am I drawing up plans to make my purpose effective and to make my vision come true?

Having vision lifts the mind from sluggish inactivity, and purpose directs it into useful, necessary and rewarding enterprise. Without a purpose, life sinks back into the passivity of a low, though efficient, type of organism, but having a high purpose is in itself a form of greatness. It leads to the plotting board where one's career is designed and planned.

There is always a moment of choice, a moment when one decides: "This is what I will do". The "Moment of Truth" is a phrase used in the bull-fight. Up to this point it has been possible for the matador, by skilful handling of his cape, to make his valour seem greater than it really is; but this moment, the moment of the sword thrust, admits no deception. It is the moment when one says to oneself: "This is it. I am on my own. I must thrust forcefully and accurately."

Young people live in a most exciting, dangerous, demanding, and rapidly-changing age. There are many unfinished jobs awaiting their skill and diligence, and there are thousands of unborn ideas clamouring to be brought into life.

Making a choice

This Letter is not about ambition regarded as a

force compelling us to compulsive activity designed to prove that we have what it takes to "succeed". It is not a lesson about having big ideas, but good ideals. It is for young people who make a well-considered survey of the years opening before them; young people who wish to choose the best path to follow through those years.

Everyone has options. Thomas Carlyle summed it up in this way: "Of all paths a man could strike into, there is, at any given moment, a *best path* for every man. This path, to find this path, and walk in it, is the one thing needful for him."

Choices have many elements. What is a picturesque cottage to a romanticist may be a wretched hovel to a social reformer. One choice may involve self-denial and hard work; another may promise wealth and ease of living.

There are people who always play safe. They never tackle more than they are sure they can handle without effort and risk. Thus they invite neither triumph nor disaster. They never learn the greatness of their mental ability or the strength of their endurance. Other persons are potential pathfinders, eagerly in search of a trail to blaze, keen to learn for themselves and to show others how good they are.

To an aspiring person choices have to be thought about. One has to know what one really wants. Some things dismissed in youth as being sentimental and unrealistic may turn out under analysis to be the imperatively needed things.

In answering the question "What do you want?" one must take note of the obligations and the limitations. We remember the tale of Martimor upon winning his knighthood. When he asked if a knight had free choice of castles in which to live, Sir Lancelot replied: "Within the law and by the King's word he may." "And what about ladies: may a knight have his choice here also?" To this Lancelot replied: "According to his fortune, and by the lady's favour."

Knighthood, with its codes of behaviour and practices, is no longer in flower, but there is a great need for young people to step forward and take their

knightly stand as responsible citizens, practising what is decent, right and serviceable in a world that is torn by dissension, distressed by suspicion, and endangered by its amazing progress in science.

Every country is buffeted by internal and external storms. Every country needs young people who will choose careers that will raise the standards of public service, promote peaceful association, and contribute to the common good. Should their vocation be political, they will realize that for them the evidence of true success is not the acclaim of a mob for their display of fiery rhetoric and bombast, but the gratitude of citizens for wise leadership, good laws, and a chance to live happily.

Fame and value

Fame should be the result, not the purpose, of conduct. Well-balanced people find value in what they do, not in the reward for doing it. Professor Erwin Schell, for more than twenty years in charge of the department of Business and Engineering Administration at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said: "Existence for you will hold fullest satisfaction when you are convinced that your ultimate efforts will surely contribute to a better world."

When you ask: "What do I want of the world?" you are really seeking to know, in a profound way, "What does the world need of me?" What is my special magic that I can use to make my contribution to life outstanding?

How is the value of a service to be measured? C. S. Forester, the British author who created one of fiction's mightiest naval heroes, Horatio Hornblower, wrote a war-time story about the skill and courage of the seamen who carried supplies to Britain through the U-boat blockade. In the centre of one convoy was a tanker. It was not important that she and her cargo of oil were valued at a half million dollars. What mattered was that if she should arrive in England her cargo would provide an hour's steaming for the entire British navy, and that was a fact too important to be measured in dollars. As Forester asks: "What money price can be put on an hour's freedom for the world?"

Some of this year's graduates will fail to realize full value in their lives. There are two unhappy sorts of person: those who think that distinction is found, not gained; and those who think that distinction consists merely in being different. Some persons are satisfied with moving in masses, not subject to social restraint. Others seek to live the simplest sort of life with the least possible trouble. Neither group has any sense of life-affirmation, but only of resignation to conditions as they are and acceptance of what is given them. Sancho Panza, squire to Don Quixote, wished to be governor of an island, if he were given one without having to fight for it or go to any trouble in ruling it.

What is vision?

Here are the opinions about vision written by three

men over a span of thirty centuries.

Solomon, a great and wealthy king of Israel in the tenth century B.C., enunciated a principle which history through all the passing centuries has firmly established: "Where there is no vision the people perish."

G. B. Shaw, journalist, essayist, dramatist and novelist, wrote: "Some people see things as they are and ask why. I dream dreams that never were and ask why not."

Herman C. Krannert, founder of the Krannert Graduate School of Industrial Administration, Purdue University, representing the most up-to-date of modern thinking, said: "Scientific management, computers, mathematical models and all of the other gimmicks which are so fashionable these days will never, in my estimation, reduce the importance of the effective dreamer. Nor substitute for him."

A nation's greatest assets are its men and women of vision, whether educators, statesmen, inventors or business people. They did not close their minds when they closed their books upon completing their formal education. They had reached a new frontier beyond which they could not explore without the aid of imagination.

Imagination is the mental faculty out of which visions arise. It deals with the *might be* element in life. It is used by every person who contemplates his present condition with a desire to improve it. It pictures an ideal toward which to work.

A story is told of Michelangelo that illustrates the point. As the sculptor was chiselling a block of marble, a boy came every day and watched shyly. When the figure of "David" appeared, complete for all the world to admire, the boy asked Michelangelo: "How did you know he was in there?"

When we are imagining we might as well imagine something worth while. There is nothing that equals in its thrilling satisfaction a hand-to-hand encounter with a large idea.

If we merely dream, without doing any chiselling, our dreams return unfulfilled to the Never Never Land, that dreary province where the word "impossible" is supreme. The enjoyment of achievement comes only to those who see a vision of what might be, form a purpose, and get busy.

This is to live in accordance with the highest ideals we can cultivate. Everyone encounters petty ambitions by the thousand, unimportant because they contribute nothing of lasting value. They represent only the top layer of desires. They do not get down to the rich fare our vision shows us of things we may have and do. Only high ideals take account of such things as the cultivation of beauty or the removal of ugliness.

Do not be afraid to think. Instead of accepting ready-made opinions voiced by others, think for yourself. You get a sense of *certainty* when you have studied a thing. The spirit of research should not be limited to a search for gadgets for today. Your vision

will lead you into long-distance thinking so that you are preparing today for solid achievement in the bright future you hope for.

The need for design

While doing today's work superbly, you should be laying out your design carefully for tomorrow. You have many rough sketches in your mind of what you wish your future to look like. Bring them together now and select those that are valid and useful. Do not be satisfied with petty ideas. Persons seeking wealth do not rummage through city garbage dumps but venture into the mountains in search of gold.

Having decided upon your purpose, you need to consider through what means it may be accomplished. There are two errors possible in this stage of planning: (1) To expend more energy in figuring out ways of doing a task easily than would be used in getting it done; (2) To try, out of laziness or haste, to skip some of the necessary operations.

Ours is not an age when intelligent improvisation may be counted upon to see us through with any degree of satisfaction. Science rejects those who try to live in half-lights or to perpetuate half-truths. It is a time when we have to find out whether our knowledge is adequate to start with and sufficient to handle the problems of the future. If not, then we need to plan for making good the deficiencies and for continuing to learn.

We learn about things in many ways. In our myths and fairy tales we become acquainted with a few of the simpler and more obvious truths of life, such as that if you are given three wishes you must be very careful about what you wish for.

We learn much by looking attentively at events and scenes and things, and by listening to people. Children like to watch people doing things: mother baking, father replacing a light bulb, firemen pouring water on a blaze, carpenters hammering nails. They collect impressions of things to be imaginative about.

We learn by doing. The motto "Learn to Do by Doing" guides the 4-H Club movement among young people. The young men and young women develop talents for greater usefulness, and they acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to their living happily and achieving satisfactorily.

When Cub Scouts visited a home for disturbed children, set up a Christmas tree, and sat around it on the floor with the children, the Cubs were learning many things about kindness, service and community responsibility.

We can learn by studying the past: academics call it history; business people call it experience.

Purpose animates all

Schools in these days do not teach pupils to chant "Life is real, life is earnest", though parents might think it not unfortunate if young people emerged

from school with some of that feeling.

Purpose is a demanding quality. The youth who has it can write a script for his life drama that will make the most of his ability and give scope for his talent. Purpose prompts a person to pursue his design with patience, vigilance, sagacity and determination. Plain, homespun abilities will accomplish much when pressed by earnest purpose.

Earnestness is dictated by the answer to this question: "How much do you want to make your vision come true?" Enough to believe in it as a good thing to attain? Enough to learn about it from the bottom up and inside out? Enough to forgo certain pleasures and some comfort in its pursuit?

Contrast Gray's *Elegy*: "The paths of glory lead but to the grave" with Longfellow's *Excelsior*. Longfellow wrote in a letter to a friend that his poem was "to display, in a series of pictures, the life of a man of genius, resisting all temptations, laying aside all fears, heedless of all warnings, and pressing right on to accomplish his purpose."

The ways of advancement in science, art and business are difficult and arduous at the best: they will break you in confusion and frustration if you go unsustained by belief in what you are trying to do. A person can live fully when he is convinced about the purpose of his life. His highest ambition is not the wish to possess but the determination to do. "Poor vaunt of life indeed were man but formed to feed on joy, to solely seek and find and feast." That is the warning given by Robert Browning in "Rabbi Ben Ezra".

About being ambitious

It is a routine thing to get a job. Everybody does it. But interest is added when one has the desire and determination to follow that vocation more skilfully and more effectively than anyone else did. The greatest gratification in a person's life is to be fulfilled, to accomplish all that he has it in him to do.

Some persons believe that there is nothing that one man or one woman can do against the enormous array of the world's ills, but many of the greatest movements of thought and action have flowed from the work of a single person.

The best objective is to show superiority by being better, not just different. There is no harm in striving for excellence, even though circumstances prevent our reaching it.

We admire a tree which, however hunger-pinched or tempest-tossed, is yet seen to have done, under its appointed circumstances, all that could be expected of a tree. On the slopes of mountains at Jasper Park, just above tree line, one sees twisted trees that, burdened beyond the season by snow and ice, pushed their branches sideways and then turned them upward when the weight was removed by the sun. They did not give up under what must have seemed to them to be unfair and unjust treatment.

Whatever profession, business or trade a graduate follows, he is bound by a basic fact: he must deal with human beings; he must care about people; he must be sincere in his dealings with them. To be sincere one must feel. A character in a book said that he could not possibly wipe the tears from another's eyes unless he had first felt his own eyes smarting.

Coping with difficulties

Everyone should expect to meet difficulty. Your potentialities may seem to be frustrated by the circumstances in which from time to time you may be living. You must go on living coherently, knowing that misfortune is sometimes opportunity in disguise. Alexandre Dumas, French dramatist and novelist, suggests in *The Count of Monte Cristo* that only the person who has felt ultimate despair is capable of feeling ultimate bliss.

Sometimes, indeed, you may have cause for rejoicing in the realization that while you have not yet succeeded you have not been irreparably beaten. You may have lost everything except the ability to start again. Go back, then, to your first principles; survey your resources of knowledge and experience; look at your purpose and revive your vision of what might be.

No one will deny that Benjamin Franklin was an all-round practical man. He was statesman, diplomat, author, inventor and publisher. He was, in the words of a biographer, "a man of cool calculating reason." What he said about the basis of his success, then, commands our respectful attention. He tells us in his autobiography that it came about through his search for perfection by practising intensively the principles of temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquillity, chastity, humility. All these became in time part of his way of life.

There are four virtues of fundamental importance: wisdom, justice, courage and temperance. We seek to be wise, which is knowing what is good and what is evil; just, which means giving to every man his due; courageous, which is the enduring of pain and affliction; and temperate, which is being moderate in all things.

Wisdom begins with curiosity. Unless you ask you do not find out, and knowledge is the basis of wisdom. It takes a fact and inquires into its meaning and its validity. By joining fact to fact and knowledge to knowledge you are helped to attain to a profounder harmony of life.

There are three virtues of the mind: clear thinking, analytic examination of facts and conditions, and the ability to communicate clearly. Joseph, sold into captivity by his brothers, became noted in Egypt as an interpreter of dreams. Really, he was a clear thinker and a keen analyst who devoted his time and brains to a close study of conditions, with a sound understanding of the economic factors that had to do with panics and depressions as well as the forces that

governed the normal and more prosperous periods. He had, in addition, developed a gift for communication, so that he was able to make his findings credible and his recommendations acceptable.

The game has rules

Some people who are eager to make something of themselves have not mastered the rules of the game: vision and ambition need to be backed up by will power and given form by energy. One cannot get much satisfaction out of endless dreaming. One must perform.

Efficiency on the job in hand and prospect of happiness in future depend upon strength of purpose and the energetic doing of something definite. There are people who fail because although they are full of admiration for the messenger boy who became the firm's president they have not what it takes to go through the messenger-boy stage.

One does not have to wear always a penitential hair shirt to keep one awake to these realities, but it is fatal to one's purpose to live always in a well-padded contour chair adjustable to one's comfort and mood.

We must remain alert, because no act terminating in itself is greatness. Every end is a new beginning. We must follow our star into the situations whither it leads, suffering rebuffs here and enjoying encouragement there, being always resolute to put into actuality the dreams we have. Along the way we adjust to the fact that there is no use in writing promissory notes to the future if we file them all under the caption "when I get around to it", or we shall be always in debt to yesterday.

John Wesley, who travelled on horseback through all parts of England preaching, wrote in his *Journal*: "I shall pass through this world but once; any good that I can do, or any kindness that I can show, let me not defer it or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

Young people leaving university or school, where they have for many years been concerned with preparing themselves for professional, commercial, or artistic careers, are not a sort of purely logical animal. There is in them, above the reasoning portion of their brains, a whole region of visions which is looking toward the surprises of the future, which is awaiting the events of the unknown.

Those who are wise will plan to carry forward their youthful ardour into the future, seeking new opportunities and challenges for its expression.

Ambition is not only a yearning for something but yearning plus a vision of possibilities and a design for turning the possibilities into certainties, and strength of purpose that does not relax until these become actualities.

People who have these qualities of ambition recognize the validity of the aphorism: what was, *was*; what is, *is*; what is to be will be what we *make it*.