

## The VIP Connection

I didn't pay too much attention as my wife answered the phone. With three teenagers in the house, she does that a lot. But when I heard her incredulous response and saw her face, I knew that this was nothing ordinary. She turned to me almost in disbelief and said, "John is dead! He was killed in an auto accident last night!"

John was a close friend of the family, a frequent visitor in our home. He had a lovely wife and six children at home. And all of a sudden, he was gone.

It doesn't take more than one experience like that to get you thinking pretty deeply about your own life. Suddenly the things that occupy your mind every day seem a little trivial compared to the bigger questions, the deeper issues, the fundamental essence of who and what you are and why you're here.

It's not always the death of someone close that opens the door to a perspective expanding experience. I've had the same kinds of feelings traveling in an airplane with an engine threatening to fail. I've had them stretched out in a sleeping bag in the Uinta Mountains looking up into a sky filled with a thousand stars. I've had them walking through the dusty roads of Cochebamba, driving by my old high school after 24 years, holding my wife's hand as she gave birth to our child.

It is during those times of deeper searching, of expanded perspective, that we begin to establish what I call the "VIP CONNECTION." The "VIP" stands for the principles involved—VISION, IDENTITY and PURPOSE. I also call it "VIP" because I believe that you and I and everyone else in this world truly are "Very Important Persons," each with unique talents and great contribu-



tions to make. VIP is that inner connection that hooks us up to our own deepest values and possibilities.

As we come in touch with our own potential and begin to deeply harmonize our inner imperatives, all the peripheral wants and shoulds that constantly float in and out of our mental awareness seem to either coalesce into a unified sense of personal mission or burst and disappear. A lot of what we think we "want" to do is really what advertising wizards have conditioned us to want to do. Or maybe it's something we really do want to do, but, as we look more deeply, we find it's not nearly as important as other, more lasting things. Much of what we feel we "should" do we find to be a reflection of what someone else thinks we should do, or perhaps it is excess baggage we have carried with us for years which has no foundation in our own personal set of values now. It is during these times of VIP connection that we are able to discard many of the puzzle pieces that have been handed to us by others and determine for ourselves what pieces fit the picture that belongs to us.

These are sobering times, meaningful times, often great times. When you really come to grips with your inner self, you feel like singing, "On a Clear Day You Can See Forever." You feel as if you're on the top of a mountain and the things you deal with every day are somehow smaller, more in perspective. You can see where you're going. Maybe you can even see the path to get you there.

But the vision doesn't last forever. You get caught back up in the routine of daily living and find it slipping farther and farther away from your conscious awareness. And before long, if you don't have some way to keep it before you or if another perspective expanding experience doesn't come along, the connection is broken and the vision becomes almost totally obscured.

The challenge, then, of keeping that connection strong becomes the challenge of capturing the vision and keeping it before us on a regular basis. I believe the single most effective strategy to accomplish this purpose is a **written creed** or **personal mission statement**.

A mission statement contains three basic elements. The first is what you want to **be**—what character strengths you want to have, what qualities you want to develop. The second is what you want to **do**—what you want to accomplish, what contributions you want to make. And the third is the **values and principles** upon which your being and doing are based.

Interestingly, statements of this kind have been discovered in the records of various civilizations throughout the ages. Modern history provides us with a number of such statements written by individuals or organizations we easily recognize for their





outstanding accomplishment and contribution.

I think the strength of the personal mission statement is fourfold. First, it forces you to think deeply about your life. It causes you to expand your perspective, to examine your innermost thoughts and feelings, to resolve the conflicts between wants and shoulds on a very essential level, and to identify the purpose of your life and what is really important to you. Second, writing it down forces you to clarify and express succinctly your deepest values and aspirations. Third, writing the statement imprints your values and purposes firmly in your mind so that it becomes a part of you instead of something you just thought about once. And finally, it gives you a tangible tool to keep that vision of your self constantly before you.

Writing a personal mission statement involves three steps.

### **STEP ONE: PROACTIVELY EXPAND YOUR PERSPECTIVE**

Because unplanned perspective expanding experiences are, by their very nature, unpredictable events, you can take a proactive approach, move into Quadrant II and plan your own.

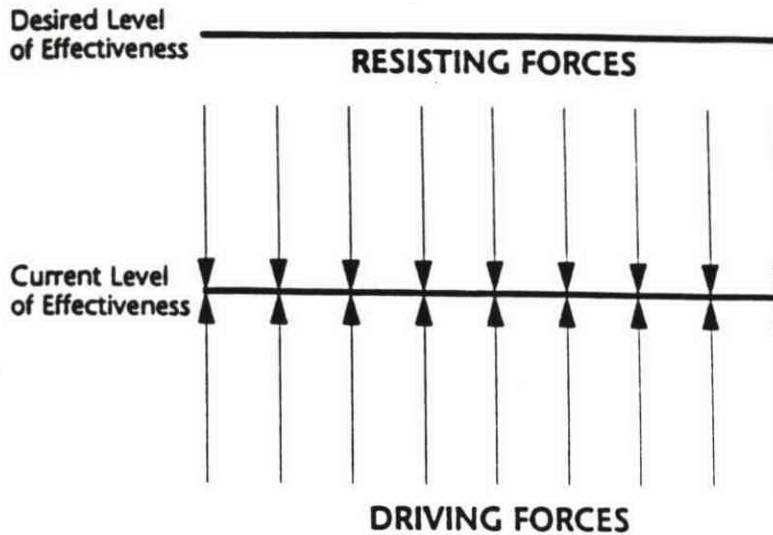
The end result of these experiences would be a written personal mission statement, reflecting what you want to be and do in life and the values and principles that will empower you.

There are a number of exercises that have proven successful in expanding perspective. Some of them can be done rather quickly with good, but limited, results. These would include such mental gymnastics as the following:

1. Plan your own funeral. Sit down in a quiet place where you can relax and let your imagination carry you to your last recognition in life. Visualize your body resting peacefully as friends and loved ones gather to honor you. Imagine who would speak at the service. What would they say? What qualities of character would you be remembered for? What outstanding contributions would they mention? As they review the major events of your life, do you feel pleased and satisfied? Look around at the people there. Do you feel you have made an important difference in their lives?
2. Try to imagine how you would feel if you were suddenly told you had only six months to live. What are the things you would want to do in those six months? Take a few moments and write them down.

For a less visual, more logical experience, you could use





Lewin's Force Field Analysis model to identify where you want to be, where you are now, and the factors that are working for and against your effort to change.

You could answer questions such as:

- What is the ideal situation? How would I spend my time? What would be the results?
- What is my current situation? How do I spend my time now?
- What are the specific factors that keep me from the ideal? What can I do to weaken or remove them?
- What are the specific factors that move me toward the ideal? What can I do to strengthen or add to them?

Other exercises that require a greater investment of time but generally bring more meaningful results might include a more in-depth experience like one my wife had recently. She has kept a personal journal on a fairly consistent basis for a number of years, which, in itself, is a powerful connecting activity. At this particular time in her life, she felt a need to reevaluate and realign her priorities. So I arranged to manage home and family needs for a couple of days and she went alone to an inn, where she spent hours reviewing the pages she had written. As she viewed her life from a more removed perspective, she was able to identify repeating patterns which could not be seen from day to day. In the overview, she found the personal direction she needed and returned home





refreshed and much more connected to her deepest values.

Another very effective experience can be created by a planned retreat in a wilderness setting. There seems to be a harmony and balance in nature that reminds us of the principles of timelessness, of forces beyond the sometimes petty challenges of our own lives. The dramatic difference in environment for those of us who live and work in confined spaces creates an awareness that we are greater than our habits and/or environment. We can listen to our thoughts and think about our thoughts. We can stand apart from our habits and look at ourselves in a way that enables us to take charge and to plan the kind of change we want to effect.

I suggest one of the best ways to begin to find your VIP connection is to take this book, some paper and a pencil with you to a favorite place where you can be alone. It may be the seashore, it may be up in the mountains, it may be in an easy chair by the fire. But isolate yourself from phones, neighbors, friends, and even family. Plan to spend several hours by yourself. Clear your mind and try to really open up to your innermost feelings.

Take your time and thoughtfully answer questions such as the ones below. If you use these questions, I suggest you overview them first. Some people prefer to begin with the more specific questions listed first and then move into a general feeling about their missions in life. Others prefer to start with the more general questions, such as 13, 14 and 15, and to gradually get more specific.

Some people prefer to read over these questions for a feeling of the level of thinking needed to write a personal mission statement, and then simply let their thoughts interact for several days or even weeks. Sometimes, the resulting mission statement emerges in a relatively short time as it all seems to "come together."

While some have to labor deeply to shift perspective, sort out values and express thoughts and feelings, others write quickly after an extensive period of thinking time. The "best" way to do it is whatever works for you.

1. When I think of the one person who has made the strongest positive impact on my life, I believe he (or she) has had a powerful influence on me because:

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2. The qualities of character I most admire in others are:

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The reason I would do that is:

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I think I would do it for (how long?):

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7. When I don't have to do something, what I like to do most is:

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8. The moments of greatest happiness and satisfaction come to me when:

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9. People who know me well think I'm very good at:

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10. When I daydream, I sometimes see myself doing something great like:

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15. When I look at my **personal** life in perspective, these are the activities that are of most worth:

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If I were to categorize these high value activities into three or four groups, I would use the following categories:

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16. The things I do (or that I could do) best that would be of most worth to others are:

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17. The talents I feel I have that no one else really knows about are:

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18. Though I may have dismissed the thought many times before for various reasons, at times I have felt that what I should really do is:





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**The values and principles I choose for my foundation:**

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One other type of exercise that gives added dimension is to look at life over a period of time. In a day of increasing life expectancy, there can be several seasons to life. Retirement now brings with it a realistic expectation of 20 years or more, opening the door to the possibility of a second career that can add great meaning to life. Often the second career is more of a choice than the first. Experience, resources and opportunity open many doors that were previously closed.

The following exercise is an excellent one to go through with your spouse if you're married. You may be thinking of a second career as a patron of the arts living in a downtown condominium, while he may be planning to purchase a horse ranch in Montana.

Having a sense of purpose often will improve the quality of life now as well as in the future. The vision of later years can revive enthusiasm for your purposes now as you realize these are not the only purposes you may accomplish. In the first column on the following chart, list the things you would really like to do at some time in your life. Then shade in the boxes, indicating when you might do each of these things. Five to ten year increments are exact enough for the purpose of this exercise.





<i>Things I want to do</i>	When (Approximate Age)									
	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	

For added perspective, go back now and note the year you will be each age. For example, if you are now 30, figure out what year you will be 40, 50, 60 and so on, and write the date above the corresponding age.

As you can see, there is no one "right way" to expand your perspective. With the MacGyver mentality, you can accomplish your purpose with any principle-based strategy that works for you.

One pitfall you want to be certain to avoid in expanding your self-awareness is misinterpreting what you may feel is a personal weakness as a primary direction in life. Some years ago, I worked with the personnel department of a large corporation. On my staff was Fred, a man who conducted employment interviews with about average performance.

I had the occasion to ask him one day if he would do one of the tasks I delegated to staff members on a rotating basis. It was a project which required statistical analysis of a number of factors in the department. Fred agreed, but when he turned in the assignment, I was astounded. I had never seen the quality of work he produced on a report like this. I immediately went to find him.

"Fred!" I exclaimed. "This is phenomenal! I've never seen anything done so well."

Fred gave me a little smile. "I enjoyed doing it," he replied. "I've always been good in math."



Now he had me puzzled. "Could I ask you a question?" I ventured.

"Sure," he replied.

"Why in the world are you in recruiting and employment? You seem to be doing all right, but you obviously have a great talent in the area of analysis. Why did you choose this particular job?"

Fred looked a little sheepish. "That's just it," he replied. "I know I'm strong in analysis. But I never have been good with people. I felt I needed to improve in that area of my life."

I shared with Fred an important concept of effectiveness I have seen validated time and time again. By focusing on our strengths, we not only increase our productivity and personal happiness, but we also use our unique talents to make significant contributions that would otherwise not be made. Of course we need to improve in areas of weakness. But to become overly focused on weakness keeps us from connecting to our inner strength and areas of greatest contribution.

A short time later, when an opening for an analytical job came up in another department, with Fred's approval, I recommended him for the job. He thoroughly enjoyed the assignment and performed with excellence. Within a year, he was managing the section. Interestingly, as his confidence grew in his new job, he became more relaxed about interacting with people and, for the most part, his weakness took care of itself.

In any perspective expanding experience, keep in mind that you will ultimately be seeking to give expression to the values and purposes that will create your inner guidance system. Remember to build on your strengths. Use the great talents and abilities you have. And also remember that **you can never build a life greater than its most noble purpose.** Those purposes that are outside self, higher than self, will empower and lift you to fulfill whatever tremendous potential you have as a "VIP."

## **STEP TWO: WRITE A PERSONAL MISSION STATEMENT**

When you feel you have a fairly accurate idea of what you want to be and to do, try writing a rough draft of a personal mission statement. I would suggest that you carry the rough draft with you and make notes, additions and deletions for at least a month before you attempt another draft. It will probably take several re-writes before you feel satisfied with the result.

When you do have a permanent copy, review it frequently. I strongly recommend that you commit it to memory. This will increase the power of the process to help you keep your vision clear and your values clearly in mind.





### **STEP THREE: EVALUATE**

It's a good idea as you complete each draft of your personal mission statement to evaluate it carefully. In addition, as you change and grow, your perspectives and values may undergo some metamorphosis. It is important that you do not let your statement become outdated. Periodic review and evaluation can help you keep in touch with your own development and keep your statement in harmony with your deepest self.

Some questions that may be helpful as you evaluate your mission statement are:

1. Is my mission based on my growing awareness of timeless proven principles? Which ones?

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2. Do I feel this represents the best within me? What changes could I make to improve it?

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3. During my best moments, how do I feel about what this represents?

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4. Do I feel direction, purpose, challenge and some motivation when I review this statement? In what ways?



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5. What strategies and skills will help me accomplish what I have written?

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6. What do I need to start doing now to be where I want to be tomorrow?

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I think it's hard to overemphasize the value of the VIP CONNECTION. I've seen a lot of people working to be more efficient at what they do, but grossly unhappy because they are doing the wrong things. Let me tell you about the tremendous difference the VIP CONNECTION made to Tom.

I met Tom at a seminar for university students. When I asked him to introduce himself and tell a little about his goals, he indicated that he was majoring in civil engineering. Later during the seminar, he was given the opportunity to share with others what he would do if he had a month with no demands on his time and unlimited funds.

"That's easy!" Tom replied enthusiastically. "I'd buy a table saw, a planer, and...oh, lots of other tools. I'd set them up in my garage, get all the kids in the neighborhood together, and we'd build things—tables, playhouses, furniture. It would be great!"

As I noticed the shining eyes, I couldn't help but remember the apathy with which he had announced his college major a few





moments before.

"You really like to teach, don't you?" I asked.

"I love it!" he said simply.

"And you enjoy working with tools?"

"Oh, you bet!"

"How are you enjoying your classes in civil engineering?"

"Oh, I don't know. There's good money in engineering..."

His voice dropped off.

"Did it ever occur to you that they **pay** people to teach kids how to build things with tools?"

As an important link in Tom's VIP CONNECTION suddenly fell into place and he realized that he could do what he really wanted to do in life and get paid for it, his expression was incredulous. His wants and shoulds converged on a much deeper level and he suddenly realized that his avocation could be his vocation. That one connection saved Tom years of the frustration and inner conflict many people live with every day.

The VIP CONNECTION is the first and most fundamental link of effective time management. It is ridiculous to consider saving minutes when you may be wasting years. There is no planner, no calendar, no speed-reading course or time-motion study that can save you that kind of time.

If you live to be 80 years old, you will have spent almost 27 years of that time sleeping and another 3 1/2 years eating. You can't afford to waste the remaining 49 1/2 years doing what you really don't want to do. After all you're a "VIP!"

\* If you would like to receive some examples of mission statements—at no cost to you—please call 1-800-255-0777.

