



Your Forty-Year Vision®

If you could imagine your ideal life five years from now, what would it be like? How would it be different from the way it is now? If you made new friends during the next five years, what would they be like? Where would you be living? What would your hobbies and interests be? How about ten years from now? Twenty? Thirty? Forty? Think about it!

Some people feel locked in by their present circumstances. Many say it is too late for them. But a lot can happen in five, ten, twenty, thirty or forty years. Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream. His dream helped all of us, but his dream helped him too. He was living according to a vision (which he thought was God's plan for him). *It gave him a purpose in life.* Most successful people have a vision.

A lot can happen to you over the next few decades—and most of what happens is up to you. If you see the rest of your life as boring, I'm sure you will be right. Some people pick the "sensible" route or the one that fits with how others see them, rather than the one that is best for them.

On the other hand, you can come up with a few scenarios of how your life could unfold. In that case, you will have to do a lot of thinking and a lot of research to figure out which path makes most sense for you and will make you happiest.

When a person finds a vision that is right, the most common reaction is fear. It is often safer to *wish* a better life than to actually go after it.

I know what that's like. It took me two years of thinking and research to figure out the right path for myself—one that included my motivated abilities (Seven Stories Exercise) as well as the sketchy vision I had for myself. Then it took *ten more years* to finally take the plunge and commit to that path—running The Five O'Clock Club. I was forty years old when I finally took a baby step in the right direction, and I was terrified.

You may be lucky and find it easy to write out your vision of your future. Or you may be more like me: it may take a while and a lot of hard work. You can speed up the process by reviewing your assessment results with a Five O'Clock Club career counselor. He or she will guide you along. Remember,

when I was struggling, the country didn't *have* Five O'Clock Club counselors or even these exercises to guide us.

Test your vision and see if that path seems right for you. Plunge in by researching it and meeting with people in the field. If it is what you want, chances are you will find some way to make it happen. If it is not exactly right, you can modify it later—after you have gathered more information and perhaps gotten more experience.

Start With the Present

Write down, in the present tense, the way your life is right now, and the way you see yourself at each of the time frames listed above. **This exercise should take no more than one hour.** Allow your unconscious to tell you what you will be doing in the future. Just quickly comment on each of the questions listed on the following page, and then move on to the next. If you kill yourself off too early (say, at age sixty), push it ten more years to see what would have happened if you had lived. Then push it another ten, just for fun.

When you have finished the exercise, ask yourself how you feel about your entire life as you laid it out in your vision. Some people feel depressed when they see on paper how their lives are going, and they cannot think of a way out. But they feel better when a good friend or a Five O'Clock Club counselor helps them think of a better future to work toward. If you don't like your vision, you are allowed to change it—it's your life. Do what you want with it. Pick the kind of life you want.

Start the exercise with the way things are now so you will be realistic about your future. Now, relax and have a good time going through the years. Don't think too hard. Let's see where you wind up. You have plenty of time to get things done.

Final note:

The fifteen-year mark proves to be the most important for most people. It's far enough away from the present to allow you to dream.



Your Forty-Year Vision™ ... It's (Almost) Never Too Late

How to Create Your Future Five Years at a Time

by David Madison, Ph.D.

When my daughter was a month old, I started writing a daily diary to preserve memories of her growing up. She's now 30 and I haven't missed a day since. Now well past the 11,000 page mark—and with my daughter living in California with her husband—I sometimes wonder why I continue writing it. But recently someone sent me a ten-year-old photo of friends and I was able to find the occasion, the day and even the hour in the diary; what a triumph! An even bigger triumph: I was able to tell my daughter what she was doing (building a snowman with me) on the day her husband was born.

Whenever I go digging in the old diaries, I am usually astounded: This happened 15 years ago!? The clichés turn out to be so true: “It seems like only yesterday,” or “where did the years go?” It's only when we look ahead that we feel that the future is so far away. Ten or fifteen years out seems impossibly far away, but September 2010 and April 2020 will one day be a reality.

And that's why, in our roles as career counselors, we try to overcome the skepticism or even ridicule that some people express when they hear about the Forty-Year Vision. We commonly hear, “I have trouble planning next week. Forty years? Give me a break!”

But we're not asking you to predict 40 years out, much less guess the distant future: This is not supposed to be an exercise in crystal-ball gazing. The career counselor who urges you to do the Forty-Year Vision is asking you to imagine, fantasize, strategize, as the first steps in trying to create the future on your terms.

On a recent consulting assignment I worked with 17 people who had been downsized by a small bank. As a way of getting them to see the value of the Forty-Year Vision, I asked them what their “dream” careers were. Did they simply want to move to other banks and continue processing financial transactions? Most were emphatic: No! And their aspirations were across the board: One wanted to get into filmmaking, another, physical therapy; another, the hospitality

industry, and yet another wanted to teach ballroom dancing.

But guess what: No one had seriously considered trying to make such career moves because it was easier and safer to drift along in their current jobs, month after month, year after year. Their aspirations were just unfocused dreams that never moved beyond the “wouldn't it be nice” stage, precisely because they had never made any attempt to structure the dream; they had never thought of making serious and realistic plans, and wishing upon a star won't make it happen!

The Forty-Year Vision will help fire your imagination.

Doing the Forty-Year Vision, however, is a first step in turning unfocused dreams into reality, and it won't seem nearly so intimidating or scary if you bear five things in mind:

(1) You don't start at the 40-year mark! We're the first to admit that this would be too much to wrap your mind around. The first notch in the Forty-Year Vision is the five-year mark. And that's totally realistic: What do you want your life and career to be like in five short years? That's only 60 months out. And 10 years out won't seem so farfetched or daunting if the five-year mark has been given some form and content. The 15- and 20- year marks then allow you to do some really creative thinking and wondering; you can develop general scenarios to strive for.

(2) Don't be fooled by the simple wisdom that “we can't predict the future.” Of course we can't; but not being able to predict the future doesn't stop you from having kids, buying a 20-year CD to pay for college or committing to a mortgage. Why let it stop you from seriously plotting your career? There's a commercial on

TV right now with the line, "If it can be imagined, it can be done." That's not necessarily so, as Bob Dole or Walter Mondale would tell you. Not everything that can be imagined can be done, but nothing will be done unless it is imagined. Goals are born in the imagination, and the Forty-Year Vision is a tool to help get the imagination firing at maximum capacity—and to give you the motivation to do the necessary planning and strategizing.

(3) Don't despair because you're "too old." Sitting down at the kitchen table on your 50th birthday to write a Forty-Year Vision may strike most people as silly. But don't forget the lament of one senior citizen: "If I had known I was going to live so long, I would have taken better care of myself." Precisely because we can't predict the future, the Forty-Year Vision is a good idea. If you do make it to 85 or 90 or beyond, don't you want those years to be fruitful, exciting and purposeful? We're living longer; the age 65 cutoff for productive years is becoming meaningless! So the 50th or even 60th birthday is as good a time as any to let yourself imagine and plan for a long future.

(4) Remember that the Forty-Year Vision is always subject to change. You're not chained down to anything; you're the one in charge. The Forty-Year Vision is a pact you make with yourself. There is no Federal Bureau for Monitoring Forty-Year Visions! As you grow and learn more about yourself and the realistic options that you face, the Forty-Year Vision evolves too; course corrections or even radical changes are part of the process.

(5) The Forty-Year Vision is meant to be fun: It's not a term paper, it's not a test. Sure, it's serious business, but let your mind go and imagine all the possibilities you can create. As time goes by and events unfold you'll need to do reality checks, but try to catch the excitement of imagining all the things you can accomplish.

Whether you choose to walk down memory lane with a diary or home movies, photo albums

or scrap books, you know that nothing you do now can change what happened 10 years ago. But your daily routine in ten or fifteen years does depend largely on the visions and strategies you develop now. So give the Forty-Year Vision the benefit of the doubt. It could change your life.

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Steve Jobs, the legendary founder of Apple Computer, has had his share of ups and downs, but he is known for staying the course. After he was ousted from Apple (by John Sculley, whom he brought in to head the company), Jobs labored for seven years on his new company, NeXT Computers, and then founded Pixar, which made him a billionaire. Later, he sold NeXT to Apple, while serving as a consultant to that company. What is the secret of his success?

*There are very few people who have a vision
and stick to it. Steve (Jobs) does.*
Keith Benjamin, quoted in *Success*,
July / August, 1996

*You need a lot more than vision
—you need stubbornness, tenacity, belief
and patience to stay the course.*
Edwin Pixar, co-founder of Pixar, on Steve Jobs.
As quoted in *The New York Times Magazine*,
January 12, 1997

*Asked what he wants to pass on to his children,
Job answers: "Just to try to be as good a father
to them as my father was to me. I think about that
every day of my life."*
Steve Lohr, "Creating Jobs,"
The New York Times Magazine, ibid
(Steve Jobs was adopted.)