**Is Your Dream Holding You Back or Propelling You Forward? by Cheryl Scanlan**

**Can I still Dream during COVID-19?**

If I were to ask a room of 100 leaders to raise their hands if they had a dream, I believe nearly every hand would go up. Why? Because we all have something inside of us that we think or dream about.

Even amidst COVID-19, dreams exist, yet possibly highly frustrated due to external circumstances outside of our control. The entire world seems to be crying out for a sense of normalcy, which can overshadow, stifle, squash or maybe even kill our dreams. Is it possible, however, that when dreams die, new dreams can be born, or some dreams can be resurrected?

Dreams precede inventions, successful companies, contagious movements and thriving communities. However, we know that it is not the act of dreaming alone that leads to successful outcomes.

Dreams that are connected with a discipline model have the greatest chance of coming alive, enduring challenges and propelling you forward.

A discipline model is a framework or a system that’s used to take the dream from the private idea phase into the real world where you and others can benefit from your dream. A useful discipline model for igniting dreams is the one that connects your dream to a vision, then to wisdom and finally to deliberate action.

**It looks like this: Dream+Vision+Wisdom=Action.**

Many have fallen short when it comes to seeing their dreams become a reality because they have not used a framework or a discipline model to help bring the dream to life.

This can be a frustrating place for a leader who wants to have an impact.

I had an experience with two business leaders - Both incredibly talented, both visionaries, both had a dream of writing a book and creating a speaking business.  Each one of them spoke about the impact they wanted to make.

The first, a CEO of a chemical company, wanted to share financial and success tools with next generation leaders. The second, a coach who wanted to share life strategies with women starting over after a major transition such as retirement, divorce, loss of a spouse or job restructure.

The first leader talked and talked about the book he would write, whereas the second leader not only talked about it but followed a discipline model to make it happen. A couple of years down the line, one was still talking about writing his book, while the other wrote the book and was approached by a production company to turn that book into a television show.

The second leader turned their dream into something that people could engage with and use to make their lives and businesses better. The first has meaningful and important information to offer the world, but he has not taken the time to turn it into something people can use. In fact, the book is only one of his ideas. He still wants to write the book, however he also has other ideas that he’s considering…most of them not making it beyond the idea stage and never brought to market. This can be a common challenge with visionaries.

The first leader is not alone when it comes to bringing a dream to life, without a catalytic converter to turn their dreams into a vision, connect that vision to wisdom (or strategy) and then move to action. The dream is stuck idling or it completely stalls. For every invention, book, movie, company and product you see, there are millions more that never make it past the dream stage. In her Ted talk, Bel Pesce shares a provocative talk on 5 Ways to Kill Your Dreams. They include expecting your dream to be an overnight success, settling for minimal success and blaming someone else when things don’t work out. There will always be reasons not to advance past the dreaming state. Those reasons will separate the dreamer from the person who is committed to making things happen.

Dreamers who are committed to converting dreams to reality recognize, that somehow, the results will bring great benefit to someone, but that is not enough of a propulsion agent in and of itself to bring about a new reality. The blind spot for the dreamer is mistaking articulation for strategy and execution. You may think because you are writing down your dream or openly sharing it that you are doing what it takes to make the dream a reality.

The dreamer may get stuck due to lack of clarity around the ultimate purpose or the why of the dream. This could include 1. the conviction of who the dream is for, 2. the value it will bring and 3. what the desired outcome will be.  Without a clear grasped of those critical dream conversion answers, it can be difficult to form a clear vision -there exist too many holes in it, still.

*Proverbs 29:18 says: Where there is no vision the people perish. It’s Interesting that this well-known scripture does not say where there is no dream the people perish. The perishing happens when the dream is not turned into a vision, a perspective or access point with which others can engage and benefit from the dream.*

Let’s look at how a discipline model will help you move from the sometimes-scattered place of constant dreaming into deliberate and measured action.

**The Dream**

You have an idea, a solution to a problem or something that will advance mankind. Not only is it a good idea, you believe it is inspired, or maybe even a gift. You can see how this dream will be of service to many; you’ve shared the dream; validated its usefulness; you even have proof or positive feedback on the success of the dream. Now it’s time to take the dream to the next level, but you’re stuck. You want to keep thinking and developing the idea instead of doing what it takes to bring it to life. You wait, think, change things, wait and think some more. Nothing happens to your dream. In fact, you’re afraid of being pinned down or put in a box so you leave your dream out of practical reach so you can tinker with it at will.

You may be asking yourself, "now that I have my dream, what’s the next step? How do I move forward?"

**The Vision**

It’s time to turn your dream into a vision. A vision is a picture of the result or the impact of the dream. Here are a few questions you can ask as you turn your dream into a vision:

-Who is this dream for? Who will it benefit?

-What type of benefit will they experience?

-What will they be able to do or become as a result of this dream becoming a reality?

Complete this statement:

I want my dream to help people do the following:

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These are the skills or tools that I need to take the next step in bringing my dream to life:

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The Scriptures speaks of writing the vision and making it plain.

*Habakkuk 2:2-3 King James Version (KJV) And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. (YES!)*

For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

The important instruction is to write the vision and make it plain…so that he that reads it may run! This is brilliant and deeply empowering to you and your dream. The act of writing the vision and making it plain will give you the ability to run with it. It gives it a structure to move from one place to another. Writing the vision makes the vision mobile. I’ve only listed a few questions that you can ask yourself when it comes to writing your vision. You may need to ask yourself many more questions. Don’t shrink back from this part of the discipline. Write as many questions, explore deeply, look at the dream from different perspectives and fill up as many pages as you need to get deeply connected to the vision as it’s coming to life. As you do this, you will feel an inner stirring or an emotional, physical or spiritual connection to the vision. You may even feel a specific nudge from the Holy Spirit giving you even more clarity. Write it all down; the only caution that I will add here is that you are careful not to get paralyzed by writing the vision. This is not an exercise of perfection; it’s an exercise of exploration and definition for the vision. Once you’ve explored and increased your clarity with probing questions, write your vision in a few short sentences or a short statement. A true vision is something that you not only write, but that you believe in and willingly embrace.

Example: My vision is to help families who are in transition due to a job change, loss of a parent or sibling or other life altering event and build communication plans so that their children can process change in healthy and safe ways.

This vision is clear and provides the framework to run with. It’s important that you believe in the vision and embrace it from the inside out because the power of nailing down the vision is the exponential realization of it. It takes courage to be willing to define the scope of the vision. This is difficult because visionaries are always seeing something more and more, yet the biggest fear is the dislike of being in pigeon-hole. There is a maturation that must take place in understanding that writing the vision and making it plain is not limiting; it provides a platform for expansion. As when looking through a telescope, there is the wide view that allows you to see the bigger picture, but it’s the narrow view adjustment that allows you to see with greater clarity the details and the specifics. This way, others looking at your vision are on the same page as you, they have more than a vague understanding of the vision, and they see it clearly and move toward it.

*Dr. Daniel Nathanson, of the Leavey School of Business in his article The Importance of a Vision Statement writes:*

*"A good vision statement is a clear picture of where you want to be at a particular point in time. The most famous vision statement (perhaps of all time) was JFK's proclamation that we will have a man on the moon within 10 years. A good vision statement will serve as a galvanizing and motivating force, especially if it is a challenge. It should be possible, but not easily attainable. It should be clear and should be described in enough detail so that people can imagine what it will be like when they get there".*

**Wisdom (Strategy)**

*"Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding;" Proverbs 3:13 (NIV)*

Now that you have your dream and have written the vision, wisdom can guide you forward. Just as you did when you explored your vision, it’s time to explore how to engage wisdom in bringing your dream to life.

You may ask, "what are the next steps I need to take to realize this dream?"

• What am I lacking?

• What resources do I have?

• Who can help me?

• When and where will my dream/vision take place?

• What’s the best path or plan to travel next in bringing this to life?

• How will I know I’m on the right path?

• Who can I seek counsel or support from?

• How can I practice resilience as my vision is being brought to life?

• How will I validate or invalidate resistance from myself or from others?

**Action/Execution**

"All men dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds, wake in the day to find that it was vanity; but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act on their dreams with open eyes to make them possible". T.E. Lawrence

Now that you have these important pieces in the place, taking action is the next step. You will be able to take more productive and consistent action because you have gained greater clarity through your discipline model. You have the dream, you know the vision and you are open to the wisdom that supports the two. Now, action will set you miles apart from the person who is always dreaming, but never moving forward.

Here’s an important thing to remember about action - it’s not perfect. The action you take now is more about alignment with the dream, vision and wisdom. Perfection is not our friend, but rather can be an enemy to realizing our dreams.

An action question to ask is "what am I creating?"

• a book

• a program

• a new service

• a new division in my company

Once you’ve done the work of the discipline mode, the fun part begins! You are ready to be a responsible steward of the dream and the vision. No one can or will do it like you, so be mindful of comparison or competition. Your only competition is you and how you are being true to the life-giving creative process.

It’s a great thing to have a dream. Having a discipline model will propel you forward so that you can bring your dream to life. Don’t believe the myth that dreamers can’t execute. Dreamers who use a framework can execute all day long with great results following deliberate action! You were made for this. I believe in you!

About Cheryl Scanlan

***Cheryl Scanlan, MCC, CMCC, BCC is president of C3Advantage. She has worked with CEOs that are in Fortune 100 through next generation small business owners. Having also run a multi-million dollar firm in New York, Cheryl knows the importance of business goals and the impact of teams. Cheryl's thought partnering method helps leaders see clearly what is fuzzy, articulate what is currently unintelligible, and generate coherent & executable strategy.***

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