

Reflecting on Progress toward the Vision

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2010, published in the *Houston Home Journal* on Saturday, September 25, 2010

Riley Dennis Jean was born just before 2pm on Tuesday, September 14, 2010. An hour later I was holding him. I was smiling and grateful.

Riley's Mom and Dad had been through a demanding night and day. They were relieved, tired, and happy. My wife was beside me, beaming. Riley and his immediate family were healthy and rejoicing. "Ah, being a granddad is as satisfying as I had imagined!"

When does a vision begin? The first thoughts are often hard to pinpoint. Did my vision of this day begin a year and a half ago when our daughter and her husband were married? Did it begin when our daughter was born, almost 35 years ago? Did it begin 50+ years ago when I realized how much I appreciated my own grandparents?

Maybe the early stages of your visions are hard to determine, too. When you were young, did you imagine yourself as charting new territory, solving difficult problems, inspiring others? What were your dreams when you were young? Was there a significant event in high school or soon thereafter that catalyzed your image of what was possible for you?

As a leader, you are responsible for imagining and communicating your organization's future direction. You align your team by providing understanding and resources, inspiring and empowering them to act consistent with that vision of what's possible. As problems occur, you address them optimistically, and you remind folks that the current events are merely preparing you for what is to come.

My counsel to leaders is to use the occasion of a particular success to ask all involved to reflect back on what you've faced and overcome. Doing so inspires even greater commitment in the future.

My vision was and continues to be a family characterized by healthy relationships with the outside world, but especially internally. In addition to love, we have a healthy respect for the unique qualities of each of us. My contribution to that vision initially was to develop myself through school and early work experiences. Later, as a husband and father, my greatest influence was with our daughter.

I'd like to celebrate the birth of my grandson by sharing some earlier times when my wife and I looked to the past and the future, working to generate a successful future family.

Because our daughter was an only child, we routinely invited her friends to come and spend the night. Many mornings I prepared breakfasts of chocolate chip pancakes! We knew the parents of our daughter's friends well, and we communicated among ourselves about our children's activities.

When she turned fifteen, I asked our daughter to work with her Mom and me on a driving agreement. Though she felt it wasn't necessary, we persisted in creating a vision of responsibility. She executed the contract beautifully. I've offered that agreement to dozens of individuals to serve as an example as they develop similar expectations with their own teenagers. (If you'd like a copy, contact me.)

Our daughter soon wanted a car of her own. I insisted she pay for it herself. When she obtained a part-time job, we started shopping for a reliable vehicle. I offered to help her obtain a loan from the bank. My objective was to establish for her a good credit rating.

The bank loan was more than she could afford each month. I offered a personal loan for making up the difference. She never missed a bank payment. For her 21st birthday, we forgave the remaining debt.

Her gradual assumption of responsibility has paid off. She took her time to find and select a wonderful husband who shares her values and is a superb father for Riley.

I've enjoyed reflecting on some steps that led to our daughter becoming a mother. My point is that you, too, should look for ways to share your organization's successes with those who've made it possible.

Pause periodically to look to the past. Identify the challenges your team members have overcome. Ask, "What have we done well?" Celebrate your answers, citing examples where individuals pulled together to accomplish what seemed insurmountable. Work to ingrain those victories in your culture.

Then ask "What can we do even better in the future?" Encourage your team to lift their eyes from the daily realities and consider the satisfaction of future shared victories. Solicit additional ideas from team members, so that the vision becomes as much theirs as it is yours.

Remember always that each individual has a life away from work. So when someone experiences the joys of a new baby in the family, join them and their colleagues in celebrating the new arrival!