



# Will and Vision:

## Keys to Advancing Your Organization

These may be the two most important one-word concepts going. Find out what they can do for your organization.

By Paul Lemberg

Remember Chux — the disposable baby diaper that took the market by storm in 1932?

Of course you don't. Back then, Chux saw its product as a luxury item and happily kept its little throwaway business to itself for almost 40 years. Then Pampers came along in the 1960s, supported by a huge vision, with persistence to match, and blew Chux out of the market — transforming baby rearing forever.

And everyone knows the legend of the two Steves — Jobs and Wozniak — who invented the personal computer in someone's garage. Only they didn't. The Altair MITS came to market long before, in 1975. But Steve Jobs was the one with the vision of a computer on every desk; and Apple II became the first PC hit.

A brilliant book, *Will and Vision* by Gerard Tellis and Peter Golder (McGraw-Hill, [www.mcgraw-hill.com](http://www.mcgraw-hill.com)), takes the concept of vision and makes it something concrete, demonstrating 66 cases where a powerful vision, combined with

Thank goodness we don't all have to be inventors or originals — only visionaries!

indomitable will, made the ingredients for blockbuster success. And the book's insights have a lot to say to nonprofit leaders.

So what does *Will and Vision* say are the key elements of success?

The authors, academics grounded in research, carefully reviewed the historical record: Vision was the number-one success element.

That's right. Big fat vision — backed by persistence, will, and relentless innovation.

Today's world offers many choices. People who lack vision are apt to drift to the next appealing project as soon as things don't go the way they planned. They lack the persistence to achieve anything important.

But *Will and Vision* offers us a look at a different kind of world. We aren't talking about a "vision" that's sloganized and prettified and pasted on a plaque. We mean the kind of vision that highlights the value of a product or service to many people and ultimately points the way to a new future. And, of course, it requires a 100% commitment to bring it into reality.

Here are a few points about a successful vision taken from the authors' research:

- **The vision must be unique.** Not uniqueness of product per se, but unique in the way your product serves the world.
- **The vision must be simple** and easy to grasp.
- **Seeds of the vision** typically exist in some form in other products or services. (Thank goodness we don't all have to be inventors or originals — only visionaries!)
- **Your vision** may be of something for which there's no market — yet. (This last bit is illuminating

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for any of us stuck in market research.)

And some important points regarding will:

- **Reaching your vision** may take a long time. Vision without will won't get you there.
- **A misplaced belief in luck** or other unseen forces hinders our ability to persist. We will find evidence that no such luck exists, and use that as an excuse to quit.
- **Persistence can manifest as a series of minor solutions**, and,

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contrarily, complacency in small successes can be a barrier to innovation that farsighted vision requires.

Some additional tips for long-term success:

- **Maintain a continuous feedback loop**, and solicit others' opinions regarding execution of your vision.
- **Keep a sharp eye** for market changes, and be willing to respond quickly.
- **Paranoia drives innovation.** A healthy fear of competitors sneaking up on you can keep your product or service fresh.

So how compelling is your vision? Is it powerful enough to nourish and sustain you? Is it important enough to mobilize the resources necessary for its realization? Is it sufficiently inspiring to partners and employees and customers and stakeholders?

If not, it may be time to get your vision checked. ■

### Resources

Jenson, Donna, "Sharing the Vision: Every Leader's Obligation," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 8, No. 5.

Jones, Richard L. & Douglas C. Eadie, "Fostering Innovation & Growth," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 12, No. 1.

Lemberg, Paul, "Don't Just Survive: Climb the Ladder of Success," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 22, No. 1.

These resources are available from the Society's Resource Center, [www.snpo.org/members](http://www.snpo.org/members).

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