

Collective Visioning

Exercise 1

The goal of this exercise is to lead a group through the process of creating a collective vision.

Collective Visioning: Imagining a World in 2045 *

You can do this exercise with your organization, family, friends or faith group. I've led a version of this exercise that lasted a whole hour with a weekend to process it. I've also led a three-minute mini-version. I've led it with as few as three people and as many as five hundred – and once at a commencement speech with students graduating from college. To really do it in the way I describe below you need about two and one-half to three hours to allow for all participants to draw their vision and reflect on them.

In order to do this exercise with a group, you need to choose a facilitator. You can also have a few people to lead the different parts. If you want to be a participant yourself, you can record the visioning exercise first, although I find that people respond better to a love voice. I usually have people sit in a circle and light a candle in the center of the circle for people to focus on if they don't want to close their eyes. Don't worry if one person is distracted or even goes to sleep. Do remember to have people turn off their cell phones. If young people are participating, you might even want to collect their cell phones because of texting. Cell phones tend to be the most distracting issue that comes up during the visioning process.

While I have written a sample script below, I change it depending on who is in the room and how much time I have. I often don't follow my script, making adjustments for the group in the moment. The most difficult issue for facilitators new to this process is the timing. In the beginning, almost everyone moves too fast. For that reason, I have included guidelines for timing.

I start by asking participants to imagine how old they will be in twenty-five years. I ask them to think of a child in their life (their own, a niece, a nephew, a sibling, a cousin, a grandchild, a student, or a friend) and think about how old that child will be in twenty-five years. Thinking of the child helps ground people who have a hard time seeing the future for themselves but can see it through another's eyes. When we visit the future, I usually have the participants talk to the now-grown child and find out what's different for her or him.

Remind people to use the words and questions that work for them during the visioning – not to get stuck on something you might say in the guided meditation. Also, tell them that if they don't see something concrete, note their feelings and any other thing that they might notice. Read slowly, leaving a few seconds between each sentence. Leave about thirty or sixty seconds between each bullet point to allow people time to fully vision and imagine.

In this particular meditation, we travel by using a time machine. The time machine was first added by a young man, Maurice Mitchell, in one of our leadership trainings. I loved it and started using his idea immediately, especially with young people, who are able to vision much better when they imagine physically travelling in time. I have found that adults also respond well to the time machine unless they're part of a very *serious* crowd. Maurice made all the fabulous sound effects. I usually find someone to do the sound effects for me now, but I have also downloaded sound effects into my iPod.

But you can get to the future in any way you wish – for instance, by walking down a hall, going through a door, or using any other way that makes sense to you for your audience.

If you like, play soft meditative music in the background. I like to do this because it helps some people stay more focused and relaxed.

Here is a possible script for the guided meditation:

Take a few deep breaths together and imagine your hearts being connected. Think about your connect to the earth and all living things. Call in spirit, whatever that means to you, whether spiritual being, ancestors, nature, music, poetry, or friends – anything that inspires you or feeds your spirit.

Take some time to imagine a world that you want to live in, that you want children to grow up in. Picture what it would look like, feel like. Think about one hope or seed of hope from this current time that you would like to see grow into fruition in the future.

- Now, imagine stepping into a time machine and turning the dial to the year 2045.
- As you speed through time, know you are headed to a place that is the future of your greatest and most hopeful dreams. As you step out of the time machine, you are aware that we have made tremendous changes and that the seeds you helped plant years ago have now become a reality. Continue creating your vision.
- Imagine stepping out into your community free of any fear or anxiety over your own and your children's safety and security. What would that feel like? What are people doing?
- Imagine having all your needs met. Imagine everyone's needs are met – we have free quality education and health care, and we are working in a safe environment for fair wages. What would be different for you?
- How have human interactions changed? What do you notice that is different as you walk around the community, into the food market, in the park, and on the street?
- Imagine you are living on a clean and cared-for earth – with safe, clean energy sources; pure, clean water for all; locally grown food free of toxic chemicals. What would that look like? Feel like? Smell like?
- Imagine a world in which fairness, honesty, and justice are values shared by everyone, including our institutions, government, and corporations. What do you see in that world?
- Visit with the child who is now an adult in this time. What is he or she doing? What has he or she seen? What is different for this person because of the work we've done to create the current world?

Ask people to spend the next ten minutes in silence imagining what the world looks like in the new future time. You can change the time – five minutes is plenty for children, for example. I usually say, "Spend the next few minutes," then pay attention to when several people start getting restless.

Ask people to look around before leaving and bring one gift, symbol, or memory that they can take back to 2020. As people who have witnessed the future, they return as *ambassadors from the future*. They know what the future can look like, and their job is to help make that future possible.

As they step back into the time machine, turning the dial back to 2020, ask them to think about their experience and what they want to tell people on their return. After a few minutes, you can arrive in the current time and ask people to come back to the space they were in before. I usually ask adults to sit for

a few moments in silence, journaling or jotting down ideas or images they want to remember, before starting the collective drawing.

Now, tell participants to draw together what they saw or felt. (In large groups of fifty or more you may want to ask them to get in small groups of four to five people. Or in the case of an auditorium, ask people to share in pairs.) Ask them to share these images and feelings with each other. After everyone is finished, suggest that all participants share their drawings (or if it's a group picture, their part of the drawing) of this future world with each other.

Spend a few minutes in reflection once everyone has shared (I give more detail on this part in chapter 6). Here are some questions to ask:

- What are the similarities, connections, and themes that have arisen out of your collective sharing?
- Do opposing ideas exist?
- How do you feel seeing and hearing about this future world?
- What have you learned?

* Add twenty-five to the current year; you can also use one, five, or ten years, or another period.