

CHAPTER ONE

DARE TO SET THE TARGET HIGH

Harmonize Vision and Values

*I always wanted to be somebody, but now I realize I should have
been more specific.*

LILY TOMLIN

Aнна Maria Chávez, CEO of Girl Scouts of the USA, is the daughter of immigrant farm workers from Mexico. She was born south of Phoenix, Arizona, in a tiny town where the per capita income is \$9,194 and the largest employer is the local prison.

Nevertheless, early on in high school Anna decided that she was going to go to Yale. “You’re a Latina, don’t you think you should stay in state?” people asked her. She ignored them and set about doing the things she needed to do in and outside the classroom to make her dream a reality. “I was like, ‘Wait a minute, I have no boundaries!’ I was determined to wind up at Yale, and I did.”

In 2013, as the first Latina to lead the Girl Scouts, Anna displays boldness and clarity of vision that have never been more important as she works to update and evolve a hundred-year-old organization so a new generation of girls can dream even bigger than she did, and “become leaders of their lives, families, communities, and businesses.” Alongside her goal of

making sure the organization directly meets the needs of the young it serves, her vision is to make Girl Scouts the leader in a nationwide conversation around girl leadership and women's roles in society.

Where do you get the skills to see the future with crystal-clear vision, as Anna did from such a young age and continues to do today at Girl Scouts? The best executive leaders see the future so vividly that they can make it real for others while they map the path to get there. Once you move out of middle management and into the executive suite, you're no longer working toward the goals of others. You set the agenda. Weeks or months may pass without input from, or even contact with, your boss. To flourish, you need to have both the courage to dream big and the practiced ability to paint the vision clearly and engage others in the plan.

BELIEVE YOU CAN GET THERE

To get to the executive suite, women need strength of vision that exceeds men's. We have to earn the right to be seen as leaders because worldwide the notion of ideal leadership is still biased toward men. For example, a 2006 Catalyst study surveyed 935 alumni of the International Institute for Management Development.¹ People from different regions identified a number of different skills as most important to leadership, but unanimously found men to be better at whatever skill they selected. In the United States and England, for example, respondents listed "inspiring others" as most important to leadership, and then rated women as less adept at it than men.

When I started out three decades ago, few women were in senior roles in the corporate world, so what *seemed* obvious—self-evident, even—was that the barriers holding us back were permanent, natural, and forever. Unmovable.

Today, however, many have broken through. Though they may be in the minority, women do hold senior leadership positions in every major industry. And yet a 2011 McKinsey study concluded that a disproportionate number of “bright, highly-motivated women at middle management levels—and higher—[frequently] turn down opportunities for advancement, look for jobs outside their company, or leave Corporate America altogether.”² Chief reasons cited included women’s fears that they wouldn’t be able to manage a family and an executive career; the concern that embedded institutional mind-sets still bar women from leadership roles; and a general lack of satisfaction with their chosen profession.

Even seemingly positive words—*balance, sacrifice, ambition, happiness*—can affect our attitude and keep us from exploring

The Leaky Pipeline

A 2011 McKinsey study found a “leaky pipeline” of women to the executive suite: in 2011 women held 58 percent of undergraduate college degrees and represented 53 percent of new hires, yet held only 37 percent of mid-level management positions, 26 percent of VP positions, 14 percent of SVP positions, and only 3 percent of CEO roles.³ Women in the study reported “specific barriers . . . that convince them that the odds of getting ahead in their current organizations are too daunting,” including:

- *Lifestyle issues.* “Many women expressed a concern about the always-on 24/7 executive lifestyle and travel requirements.”
- *Embedded institutional mind-sets.* “Managers (men and women) still tell diversity officers that ‘Everybody “knows” you can’t put a woman in that particular slot.’”
- *Embedded individual mind-sets.* “Women are, on average, less satisfied than men with their chosen professions and jobs . . . [and] as women get older, their desire to move to the next level dissipates faster.”

our full range of possibilities. These words and the cultural myths into which they're woven are powerful, but only because we ourselves endow them with power by letting them define our stories.

It's so easy to let our vision be defined—and limited—by others. Perhaps you've heard that elephants, despite having legs like tree trunks, can be tethered by a stake in the ground barely bigger than a pencil, simply because as babies they learned the painful way that the stake would hold them. Once they believe the tether holds, they never try to escape it.

Each of us needs to make sure that none of the tethers that still hold us back are self-imagined—and to dare to take that final leap.

MAKE YOUR PERSONAL VISION SPECIFIC

To be a woman aspiring to a top leadership position, you've got to dare to go beyond the circle that's been inscribed for you. And you've got to develop a sense of vision so strong, so clear, so audacious, that when people either subtly or explicitly tell you that a certain cherished goal is a fantasy, you ignore them and go to Yale anyway—or whatever your equivalent is to Anna's brass ring.

I have mentored and coached many women over the years. What continues to surprise me is how many times I have an initial meeting with someone and she can't tell me what it is that she wants. You might think this is a problem limited to young women, but I see it in many who are mid-career as well. It is very hard to coach someone for success when she herself has not defined what success looks like to her. When I get a vague or noncommittal response from someone, what I'd like to say is, "Well, my crystal ball isn't working very well today."

There are many aspects of your career that people can help you with, but defining what you want is something that only you can do. You can seek counsel and ask others' advice, but in the end it's up to you to determine what you want.

I know I can't be too critical here, because I wasn't always certain of what it was that *I* wanted. I believe I could have been more successful earlier if I had been more strategic about what I wanted and how I was going to get there. It is a great moment

The Mentors Speak: On Vision and Values

My grandmother instilled in me a sense of determination, a belief that all of us have an imaginary train track inside of us and our job in life is to stay on that track until we arrive at our destiny, no matter what it takes. Throughout life, you'll encounter people and events that will try to knock you off, but you have to fight with every fiber of your being to stay on that track.

Anna María Chávez, CEO,
Girl Scouts of the USA

Anything is possible. I am an example of that. Adapt the goal when you have to, but don't give up on it. You may not have it all in the timeline you planned, but anything is possible if you work hard, prepare hard, and never give up. Find your mentors, and find your advocates in all areas of your life.

Veronica Sheehan, SVP,
*Global Network Operations
and International IT,
Turner Broadcasting System*

Spend time to assess your value system, align career and life choices to those values, and live every day in a way that when you go home and look in the mirror, you can say, "I was *me* today." These are the most important steps to building self-confidence. They also eliminate the risk of having to decide who you are in any given circumstance.

Lyn McDermid, CIO, Federal Reserve System

when you realize that your sense of being tethered is just that—*your* sense, rather than an absolute reality. But what use is pulling up that stake and freeing yourself if you have no idea where to go?

“Where there is no vision, the people perish,” goes one of the proverbs in the Bible. That’s a very old piece of wisdom, and I wish someone had reminded me of it early in my own career.

Don’t make the mistake of thinking of *vision* as something soft or impractical, reserved exclusively for poets, artists, or inventors. *Vision* is about being perfectly clear about what you want to achieve and why, to the point of being able to picture yourself having done it. It’s daring to let yourself think big, beyond the next step, looking toward a whole career or an entire life. *Vision* is about setting goals that are both intensely meaningful to you and bigger than you think you can achieve.

DARE TO WRITE A PERSONAL VISION STATEMENT

Your personal vision statement describes what you want your life and career to look like in the future. Developing one at every stage of your career—in fact, annually—not only will help propel you to the top but also will prepare you for the unique challenges of executive leadership. Once you understand what you want, you can then create an action plan to get yourself there. There are others who have accomplished what you desire, and they can show you the way. But the first step toward self-belief is self-clarity, possessing a clear vision of what you want in your life and career.

Why is putting your vision in writing so important? Two-thirds of your brain are involved in processing visual information, such that writing something down is the closest equivalent to using a zoom lens for your brain. Shifting your vision from “idea” to “object” makes it more real. It

allows you to reflect on it and develop it—and, perhaps most important, to share it. As a leader, your effectiveness depends on not just seeing the future but persuading others to see it as well.

The beauty of having a vision statement is that it can be your guide through both your work and your personal life. It allows you to prioritize where you invest your time. It helps you know when to say no to things that don't fit your plan. It can also act as a yardstick against which you can measure the current situation and your progress. Reread your most recent plan frequently, remembering that every time you do, you further embed it in your memory and are better able to visualize making it happen.

My own vision statements have changed over time. Yours will, too. I have developed mine using the values that are important to me. I'll share them:

Fifteen years ago:

I will be a senior leader in my company who has a reputation of delivering results with integrity and helping people around me succeed in their personal and professional lives. I will keep myself fit and healthy and seek constant learning. My faith and family will be my top priorities.

Today:

I will make all decisions in my life through the lens of my faith, stay healthy and focus on the needs of my friends and family, and enjoy life while finding ways to help others.

Your vision should be flexible enough that it doesn't bind you when a great opportunity comes along. You need to be ready to adapt as situations change or new information becomes available. That's the funny thing about leadership:

you have to see the goal, but be able to dodge and pivot like an Olympic soccer player as conditions change over time.

For example, although it's not explicit in my vision statement, writing this book is part of delivering on my personal vision. I've learned a lot about being successful in life, and I am trying to help others by passing it on.

Vision statements are like road maps. They need updating because there are always new roads being built. Some roads may make the trip faster or more enjoyable, but each new path must be carefully evaluated according to what you want in your personal and professional life.

Once you've crafted or updated your vision statement, you should put together a more detailed plan of steps you'll take over the next months and year to get there. This is the moment to describe your goals as specifically, objectively, and even quantitatively as possible, because this gives you a clearly defined target to shoot for and helps you translate thoughts and dreams into the actions necessary to transform them into reality.

As you move forward in your career, there will be times when your vision clouds. Moments of tedium and stress can challenge your desire to continue pressing forward. Roberta Bondar, Canada's first female astronaut, told me that at one time she had reached a point in the space program when her passion dulled and it began to feel like a "job."

"When I was actually in space, I floated over to the window to look down at Earth," she told me. "While looking through that window I began to think about when my sister and I played space games as children. We used to put sheets over the furniture and pretend we were in a spaceship. I thought about all the things that went into helping me get to where I then was, in that moment. That helped me regain my vision."

Fortunately, you don't need to go all the way to outer space to refocus yourself. Looking back and reflecting on all you have accomplished—and all those who have helped along the way—can quickly bring your vision back into bright, vivid focus.

CORE VALUES: YOUR VISIONARY GPS

Although our vision will change over time, our values tend to stay the same. Core values serve as an infallible GPS that guides our vision by defining our internal conduct as well as our interactions with others. They give us the courage required to make even the most difficult decisions, those that ultimately define our career.

When Beverly Daniel Tatum was offered the chance to join the running for the presidency of Spelman College in Georgia, she almost turned away from it. It was a giant leap in responsibility and would mean moving to a new state, which would require interrupting her husband's career and yanking her son out of his high school. The position would take her way outside of her comfort zone, make her the public face of an institution, and give her work not just regional but national significance. "There were many good reasons to stay put in Massachusetts," she says.

But then, during a visit to the campus to help her decide, she picked up a brochure and read the school's mission statement: "An outstanding historically Black college for women, Spelman promotes academic excellence in the liberal arts, and develops the intellectual, ethical, and leadership potential of its students. Spelman seeks to empower the total person, who appreciates the many cultures of the world and commits to positive social change."⁴

"Excellence, leadership, empowerment, appreciation, and respect for others—these five values have been at the core of my personal and professional work for my entire career," says Beverly. "I could not imagine a better or more concise statement of what is important to me. When I read these words, I knew what I should do."

Back at home, she shared the brochure with her husband, who responded by saying, "If you don't pursue it, you will always

regret it.” As a family, they agreed that if she were to be selected as president, her son, David, and husband, Travis, would remain in Massachusetts for two years, for David to finish high school and for Travis to become eligible for state retirement benefits.

“The prospect of the separation was daunting, but we decided to move ahead,” she says. “That visit to Spelman College convinced me that I could make a unique and meaningful contribution to higher education and the world by leading this institution, which had such a powerful mission so in tune with my own values. For all the reasons that made me initially

The Courage to Lead a Nation

Laura Liswood, cofounder of the Council of Women World Leaders, interviewed fifteen elected heads of state and leaders of government, including former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher.⁵ Her interviews with these individuals provide some great insights into the nature of women’s leadership and confidence. Liswood discovered that although the female leaders varied in many respects, they had four characteristics in common:

- *A diverse view of the world.* They understood what was happening within their country, what was happening globally, and where their country fit.
- *Courage and conviction.* They were willing to take risks and challenge the status quo, honoring tradition but never believing that everything *had* to be the way it was. Their role, as they saw it, was to prepare for the future.
- *Excellent communication skills.* First and foremost, they were great listeners. They sought feedback from a wide range of constituents before they delivered their succinct and powerful messages.
- *Spiritual grounding.* Although they had different religions and faiths, their spiritual orientation guided them, especially during the most difficult of times.

hesitant, I felt nervous about my choice, but at the same time, I reflected on the words of a pastor friend who told me, ‘God will not lead you where God cannot keep you.’”

A Survival Guide for Tough Decisions

Whether we realize it or not, we all have core values. They influence our feelings and determine our priorities. Once you’re an executive, you’ll be asked to develop a vision that serves the broader direction of your company. How you accomplish that vision, however, is almost entirely driven by your own value system. Because you serve as a role model for everyone you lead, your values will cascade down through the organization. So remember, this isn’t just about staying true to your own beliefs. Leadership presents the opportunity to make an impact beyond your immediate reach.

The difficulty lies in that not all core values are created with full consciousness, which makes it easier for us to trip ourselves up in aligning vision and values. There’s a serious practical danger here. When we set goals that are misaligned with our values, our motivation to act on those goals wanes quickly; likewise, when we make decisions that “just don’t feel right,” our ability to follow through successfully is severely handicapped. Intrinsic motivation—when we’re propelled by desire from within—leads to much more successful outcomes, according to Heidi Grant Halvorson, author of *Succeed: How We Can Reach Our Goals*.⁶ Finally, misaligned values affect our ability to lead others. People are less likely to trust us when they sense that we’re being inauthentic and lack confidence in our mission.

Being more deliberate and more conscious about how you formulate your core values is essential to setting you on the right path to achieve your personal and professional vision. For one thing, conscious work around identifying values helps ensure that these values are truly yours—*chosen* rather than

merely absorbed from your environment without reflection or reason.

Thoughtfully defined, your core values work in harmony with your vision to outline, quite vividly, just what it is you want to do, and then dramatically improve your planning and follow-through over time. They allow you to create a career of your own choosing rather than a course determined by the decisions or prejudices of others.

More immediately, values help you in everyday decision making, particularly when decisions concern your relationships. If you create a strong set of core values, you will find that when you honor them, you will feel—well, you feel a deep sense of satisfaction, even when decisions are difficult and make some people unhappy.

Being clear on core values helped Carol B. Tomé navigate one of the most challenging assignments of her career successfully: serving as the CFO of The Home Depot during the worst recession in the United States since the Great Depression. Between 2006 and 2009 the company lost \$13 billion in sales. As the business contracted, the leadership team had to make some tough decisions, including closing stores, exiting certain lines of business, and reducing 10 percent of the company's support staff. Carol was asked to analyze the situation and make these recommendations, and was charged with communicating the company's actions and their financial implications to the world.

“All of our decisions as a leadership team were guided by our company's core values, which stress taking care of associates, customers, communities, and shareholders,” says Carol. “When you stay focused on your core values, the decision-making process is straightforward. Because of this, I never lost sight of my responsibility to these key groups, especially our associates. I realized that they were all counting on me, and that I couldn't let them down.”

The need to downsize was a fact, not something that Carol could control. What she could control was how they did it. “For

instance, when we decided to close our Expo business, I visited the impacted stores and talked to both customers and associates about our decision,” she told me. “I wanted them to know that these were hard decisions that were not made lightly, and I wanted to shake their hands and personally thank associates for their service and customers for their business.”

“While we had to make difficult decisions, we also had ample opportunity to show that we were committed to taking care of our store associates. While other companies were cutting bonuses and eliminating 401(k) matches, we chose to continue those incentives for our associates, as well as annual pay increases. The Home Depot’s founders, Bernie Marcus and Arthur Blank, said that if you take care of the associates, they will take care of the customers and everything else takes care of itself. I believe in that philosophy to my core . . . and our investment has paid off!”

Under Carol’s leadership, the company achieved its revised financial targets a full year ahead of the goal, putting the company on a solid course toward a stellar financial condition, earning revenues of more than \$70 billion and providing jobs for 331,000 people in 2012.

Knowing When to Walk Away

Never doubt the sheer power of core values consciously conceived. I first became fully aware of this power as recently as fifteen years ago. One of the women I most admire and who was a great mentor to me abruptly left her position as vice president of her company. All of us who knew her were deeply shocked. She was the company’s first woman officer, and she was clearly on a track there to achieve a lot more. I was anxious to speak to her about her sudden departure, and, for her part, she was eager to explain.

She told me that she has always tried to live her life with integrity, and relied on her core values to guide the way she

managed her life and career. Well, her bosses had asked her to cover up a company mistake. They asked her to lie to their customers and to their employees. When she responded that she could do no such thing, she was told that failing to get on board would “not be good for her career.”

My friend was not intimidated. Not only did she refuse to “get on board” but also she told them that she would leave the company if they did not admit their mistake, take responsibility for it, and work toward making it right. When her bosses refused to do the right thing, she walked her talk. She left.

After this explanation, I was no longer shocked by her departure. Under the circumstances, I would have been shocked—and dismayed—had she *not* left. As for the company, it was successfully sued two years later for millions because an unreported flaw in a product had, tragically, led to a death. Bankruptcy followed.

By that time, of course, my friend and mentor had moved on to another firm, where she quickly achieved the same level of success she’d had with the former employer. Staying true to her values had given her the courage to make the decision to leave. Difficult? Yes. But it kept her on the path she herself had chosen long before her employer decided to leave it.

“If you can’t harmonize your hopes, aspirations, and values within the context you’re working in, then it’s time you move away from that environment,” says Rebecca Jacoby, the chief information officer and senior vice president of the IT and Cloud & Systems Management Technology Group at Cisco. Like my friend, Rebecca once had to walk away from a company due to a conflict in values concerning the company’s handling of decisions about resources during a difficult economic time. “I had to decide how I would handle the situation, and it all circled back to understanding myself and the context of my environment, and being able to harmonize those two things. Ultimately I left the company.”

It's worth noting that when you make tough decisions driven by core values, there's no guarantee that the world will immediately reward you for doing the right thing. That said, if you choose the path that allows you to live up to the standard of your own values, *again and again and again*, your chances of success start looking pretty great.

You Can't Have Everything—So Know What's Most Important

Of course we can't have it all. No one can. Life requires prioritizing and making difficult choices. But the secret to navigating those choices is a well-defined core of vision and values. If you know what's most important to you, you can make decisions with confidence and be satisfied with what you *did*, rather than mired in regret for what you *didn't*.

One of the most raw, honest conversations I've had on the subject of balancing family with work was with my colleague Penny Manuel, former executive vice president of engineering and construction services for Southern Company. Her husband, Don, left his own career so that he and Penny could relocate to pursue her professional dreams. In 2010 she took on one of the most challenging assignments of her career. She was responsible for managing major construction projects on seven sites, including the country's largest biomass facility in Nacogdoches, Texas, and twenty-first-century coal gasification in Kemper County, Mississippi. Eight months into the job, Don died very suddenly at age fifty-two.

"The first few months after his death," she says, "I was bitter and angry at myself for allowing work to interfere with what would be our last months together. It seemed to me that I had spent the last year of Don's life worried about the wrong thing."

Looking back, her perspective shifted. She told me she saw what she "couldn't see in real time," and offered this advice:

“Define the work-life balance for you, for your family, and for your career. Each of us makes choices every day. A professional career is hard and demanding, but it is what Don and I chose together, and he was proud of me. He allowed me to do what I do, and we both made sacrifices for it. Don’t be afraid to work really hard. Don’t be afraid to be bold. Don’t be afraid to go somewhere you’ve never been. Believe in yourself, and don’t be afraid.”

Dare to set the target high, and reach it with courage and grace.

Dare to . . . Define Six Core Values

In the end, we each have to define our own core values. I have found that keeping my list and reviewing it often gives me the energy I need when confronted with tough decisions. Let me share the six that I’ve consciously defined to guide my vision and, in fact, my daily life.

- *Integrity.* I tell the truth and do what I say I will. If I can’t do something I committed to, I tell those concerned why I cannot. I speak up when I see things that don’t look right.
- *Growth.* I am committed to seeking continual personal development. There is so much to learn in the world, and I want to stay competitive.
- *Love.* I need love, and I have a lot to give: love of life, people, animals, and nature; most important, love of friends and family.
- *Giving.* True joy really does come from helping others. From those to whom much is given, much is expected. Whenever I can help someone, I do.
- *Fun.* Life is short. I need to enjoy the journey and not sweat the small stuff.
- *Faith.* I endeavor to be humble before the Lord and honor Him in all that I do.

Your turn!