

Creating and Sustaining Audacious Goals

How do we set and maintain stretch goals?

The purpose of this tool is to enhance your ability to articulate bold aspirations—aspirations that are clear enough to generate challenging but achievable goals that promote creativity and action, and that can be sharpened and sustained over time.

Learning Goals:

- Capturing aspiration using "creative tension"
- Identifying and overcoming pitfalls that surface when articulating audacious goals

Phase(s): This tool is best used by groups and individuals engaged in a Phase 3 effort along the Pathway for Transforming Regional Health

How to use this tool

This tool focuses on establishing and maintaining creative tension—knowing simultaneously what you want and what you have. This can lead to “out of the box” thinking and audacious goal setting based on what really matters to you. When you can see creative tension as distinct from psychological tension, that is, how you feel in the face of creative tension, you can more consciously choose to act out of creative tension and manage psychological tension. Otherwise, rather than you having your emotions, they have you and they run the show.

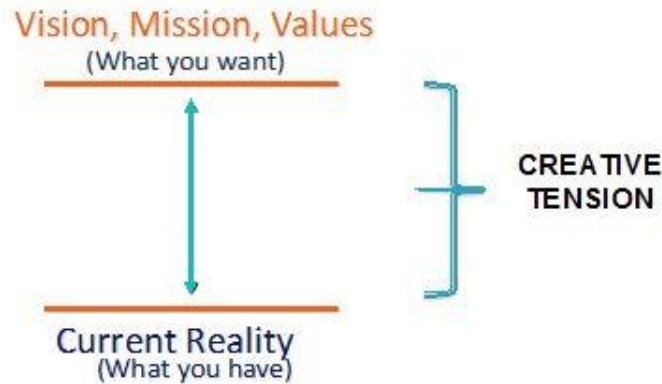
The last section of this tool includes discussion questions for your leadership team that can be used to help plan and facilitate creating audacious goals within your organization and/or regional collaborative.

This tool is most effective when completed by people deeply engaged in the regional change effort and well-informed about all its areas activity, such as those who are part of the core stewardship team leading the effort, or part of the backbone or integrator organization.



Establishing Creative Tension & Managing Psychological Tension

The idea of creative tension is a core part of the practice of Personal Mastery¹—a discipline of being generative vs. predominantly reactive.



Sustaining creative tension involves learning to keep both vision and a clear picture of current reality before us. Tension, by its nature, seeks resolution. It's as if we have set up a rubber band between the two poles of our vision and current reality.



Source: www.solonline.org

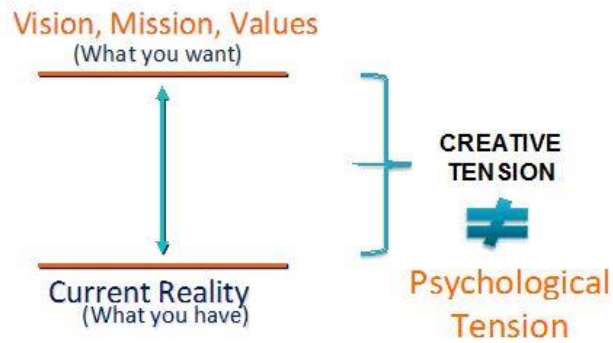
Tension can resolve itself in two basic ways: in favor of our vision or in favor of reality.

Holding the vision resolves tension in favor of what we want. There are many great examples, from landing a man on the moon to sinking a putt on the golf course. And you may have examples about access to care or every child healthy at their first birthday.

Resolving tension in favor of reality means we let go of the vision, usually because we experience discomfort with the difficulty (or even seeming impossibility) of the vision, some concern about actually succeeding, or even thoughts that we don't deserve it. So we keep things the way they are.

¹See Senge, Peter. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (Doubleday, 1990; 2006) and the Fifth Discipline Fieldbook series.





How do we cope with emotional or psychological tension? Some of us have elaborate strategies – organizations often seek to motivate action through crisis to persuade us that we simply can't keep things as they are. Looking closely and clearly at current reality is one of the most difficult tasks of the discipline of holding a vision.

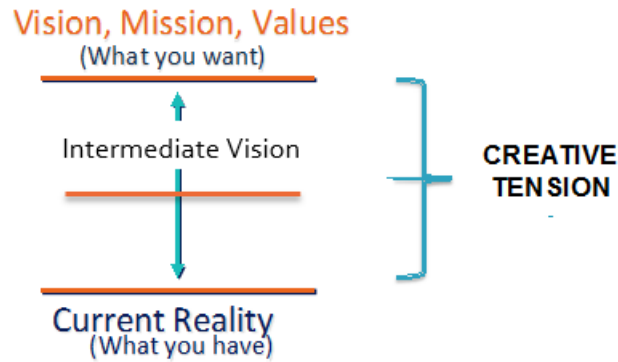
For now, notice where your energy flows—toward holding the tension, or lessening it—and recognize that the tendency is also just part of current reality.

One way to think of your leadership job is therefore about establishing and maintaining tension.

How to establish healthy, generative tension? The Goldilocks challenge!

There's an art to establishing the right amount of healthy tension.

- **TOO LITTLE:** Not much happens; you settle for what you have because it's close enough; other things are more important and generative (e.g., losing the last few pounds; reducing smoking by 1%).
- **TOO MUCH:** Psychological tension dominates because the tension "breaks"—the vision seems out of reach (e.g., going from 100% volume payment for healthcare to 100% based on value; zero infant mortality).
- **JUST RIGHT:** A stretch that can be managed, and vision is reset as progress is made; those who can hold a greater tension should, but meet people where they are (e.g., switch 250,000 people [in a major metropolitan area] from being smokers to being non-smokers)!



One way many organizations and communities manage tension is to have some people serve as the visionaries and others become the pragmatists. This does allow a group collectively to hold creative tension, but it's not the best case. Better is when everyone can simultaneously hold vision and reality. So you not only want to build shared vision, you want to build shared reality, too.

Some reflections on healthy creative tension²

1. When you set *annual* (short-term) goals, you tend to think small and/or incrementally. So set longer-term goals, and then short-term goals.
2. Setting longer-term goals allows you to put some tension in the system, tell stories about challenges, opportunities, good years and bad years. People might not know how they're going to get there, but at least they know the direction they're headed.
3. Regional health transformation initiatives do not just happen. They are often a result of setting big, hairy, audacious goals that participants really were not sure how to achieve. Holding the vision encourages experiments and innovation.
4. When others don't take action when you expected them too, be sure to ask them about how they see reality as well as revisiting vision. What you may see as a big aspiration, they may see as a minor improvement because you aren't starting from the same place.

² Adapted from "Using Creative Tension to Reach Big Goals," an interview by Nina Kruschwitz with Dave Stangis (of Campbell's Soup) in the *MIT Sloan Management Review*, November 10, 2011. <http://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/using-creative-tension-to-reach-big-goals/>

Visioning Guidelines – How to tune up your vision?³

Some goal formats are better than others in terms of achieving results. There are just two basic guidelines: tell the truth about what you want and focus on the result. No one wants to invest in a compromise. The World Health Organization and The World Bank regularly articulate global goals (e.g., the millennium development goal to improve maternal health). Use the following guidelines to test and refine elements of your vision.

1. Focus on what you want

- put yourself and those affected in the picture
- whether or not you think it's possible

ASK: Is it what I/we want? If I/we had it, would I/we keep it?

"In the case of maternal health globally, maternal deaths dropped 45% between 1990 and 2013 . . . While substantial progress has been achieved in almost all regions, many countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, will fail to reach the Goal 5 target of reducing maternal mortality by 75% from 1990 to 2015. Every day, nearly 800 women across the globe die due to complications during pregnancy and childbirth, and 99% of these deaths occur in developing countries . . . Investing in better maternal health not only improves a mother's health and that of her family, but also increases the number of women in the workforce and promotes the economic wellbeing of communities and countries. Untreated pregnancy and birth complications mean that 10-20 million women become disabled every year, undermining their ability to support their families."

2. Focus on the result

- see it in the positive (vs. getting rid of something you don't want)
- check that you are clear about the ends (vs. focus only on the means)

ASK: Is it a result? If I had it, what result would it bring me? (Do I want to add that result to my vision?)

The maternal health example highlights a challenge: how do we state the result in the positive? For example, the vision is to increase reproductive choice and planning, the number of intact families, and women in the workforce. Negative vision is often motivating, but successful endeavors often shift from

³Based on the work of Robert Fritz and Charlie Kiefer.

reacting to a problem to achieving a positive result. In many cases, asking what you want really helps. For example, reducing teen pregnancy is often about helping young women make good life choices. It is best to say you want both these things to strengthen your vision. As an example: "If young Nigerian women had the same employment rate as young men, the country would add \$13.9 billion to GDP annually."

Similarly, it is very helpful to clearly name both ends and the means. A group has a goal to draft a business plan. That's great, and we know how many plans end up and drawers and virtual file cabinets. If we had the plan, what result do we want that to bring us? Name that goal too.

These are great coaching questions to help test and refine your vision.

Summary: Discussion Questions for Stewardship Teams

1. Creative tension: What do we really care about creating? What is reality relative to what we care about—the good, the bad, the ugly?
2. Vision tune-up: How can we restate our vision to make it more specific, positive, and real? (Also see guidelines for "story of now" in the Phase 1 page of the Stewardship Guides) If we are wildly successful, what would that lead to? Are there any other things we should be considering to get to those results?
3. Psychological tension: What beliefs or feelings might be getting in our way? How can we use what's useful about them to learn and proceed?

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