

Article: "Thinking About The Future" by Nelson Searcy (reprinted with permission from SmartLeadership.com)

The leader who refuses to think about the future soon will not have to worry about the responsibility of leadership! Thinking about the future is necessary for any leader for at least three reasons: 1) Thinking about the future gives the leader focus. 2) Thinking about the future allows for a proactive response. 3) Leaders think about the future because vision resides in the future. SmartLeaders understand the significance of the future and take the lead in planning for the future.

The leader who refuses to think about the future soon will not have to worry about the responsibility of leadership! Leadership and the future are intimately tied together. SmartLeaders think about the future, because they know that one of the major realms of leadership is the realm of the future.

A FUTURE FOCUS

Thinking about the future is necessary for any leader for at least three reasons. First, thinking about the future gives the leader focus. The future helps a leader determine what she should do and what she should not do! Determining one's actions by the demands of the day is a sure path to mediocrity. SmartLeaders look beyond the busyness of the day into the realm of tomorrow in order to determine the direction of their sails. Author Dave Ellis writes that thinking about the future can "help you purge your to-do lists and clear the clutter from your calendar." (See *Creating Your Future* by Dave Ellis at <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0395902487/smartleadership/>).

Second, thinking about the future allows for a proactive response. While leaders cannot predict the future, they can go a long way in creating the future. One of the many myths about the future is that it is 100% predetermined and we, as lackeys of time, must idly await its arrival. SmartLeaders don't await the future; they create the future.

Finally, leaders think about the future because vision resides in the future. If leadership is defined by influence it is determined by vision. SmartLeaders know that the primary action of a leader is to cast vision. A person who sets direction by only looking to the past is a great historian but a poor leader. Leaders create the future by casting a compelling vision that both aligns with and directs the future. Richard Beckhard and Wendy Pritchard, in their 1992 book, *CHANGING THE ESSENCE*, wrote:

"A vision is a picture of a future state for the organization, a description of what it would like to be a number of years from now. It is a dynamic picture of the organization in the future, as seen by its leadership. It is more than a dream or a set of hopes, because top management is demonstrably committed to its realization: it is a commitment." (p. 25)

THINKING FUTURISTICALLY

Because leaders think about the future, here are some suggestions to assist you:

1. Read about the future. Three books and two magazines stand out:

THE DREAM SOCIETY by Ron Jenson

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0070329672/smartleadership/>

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE TRUTH by Walter Truett Anderson, Editor

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0070329672/smartleadership/>

THE LEADER OF THE FUTURE by Frances Hesselbein, Editor

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0787909351/smartleadership/>

THE FUTURIST (magazine) <http://www.wfs.org/futurist.htm>

FASTCOMPANY (magazine) <http://www.fastcompany.com>

2. Spend time pondering the future. Hanz Finzel, author of **THE TOP TEN MISTAKES LEADERS MAKE**, suggests that you get away at least quarterly to reflect on the future. SmartLeaders take time to do some focused dreaming about what could be. (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1564762467/smartleadership/>).

3. Anticipate the future with a positive attitude. Many leaders have an unhealthy dread of the future - perhaps even a fear of the future. Leaders that thrive in the years to come will be those that are self-confident enough to realize that no matter what the future holds they will overcome and triumph. Such confidence is not false hope but rather it is the product of proper planning and the development of essential tools that ensure a hopeful future.

FUTURE SHIFTS

The tools that leaders will need in the future are found when we shift our thinking in three particular areas. In a recent SmartLeadership survey we asked leaders to identify the top challenges facing future leaders. The overwhelming majority pointed to two troublesome areas: 1) The increasing pace of change and 2) The increasing volume of information. The following three shifts in thinking provide solutions to these two potential leadership problems.

SHIFT #1

From Problem Solving to Problem Predicting

We have stated before that the vast majority of leadership is problem solving. Problem solving will continue to be an important work for leaders but a shift is necessary. We must move from problem solving to problem predicting. Trained futurist call problem predicting "Non-Linear Extrapolation." Non-Linear Extrapolation means that you don't just look at the direct results of an action, but that you examine the indirect and unintended consequences of an action.

SHIFT #2

From Specific Planning to Scenario Planning

Most successful leaders are already good planners -- they have to be! Yet, the future calls us to go one step beyond specific day-to-day planning, we must move into 5 - 10 year scenario planning. Leaders do not have crystal balls but with a certain amount of research and insight they can plan for two, three or four possible future scenarios. Scenario planning allows leaders to deal with the rapid rate of change occurring in our society by giving them handles for understanding what might happen. For more on Scenario Planning, see *THE ART OF THE LONGVIEW* by Peter Schwartz .

SHIFT #3

From Solitary Mind to Master Mind

Information is increasing at an alarming rate. To adjust to the onslaught of information, leaders need more than their solitary mind - they need a Master Mind. Leadership expert Napoleon Hill first analyzed the principle of the Master Mind in his book *THINK AND GROW RICH*. Basically a Master Mind is a collection of multiple people, with different expertise, who come together to focus on one particular problem or arena. With a Master Mind, the leader doesn't need to know it all, because he has relationships with experts who do! Collective wisdom is better than a collection of wisdom. Two SmartLeadership tools may be useful to you in this area:

FUTURE CHALLENGE

"My interest is in the future because I am going to spend the rest of my life there," wrote Charles F. Kettering. SmartLeaders understand the significance of the future and take the lead in planning for the future. Thinking about the future and making these three shifts in our work habits is an initial step to ensuring that the future that transpires is the future you desire.

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