

## Exploring and Conceiving Our Personal Vision as a Teacher, Leader and Person

From The *Transformative Educator's Guide to Mindful Practice*

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<http://web.calstatela.edu/faculty/jshindl/cm/MIndfulnessIndex.htm>

### Your Personal Vision for Your Life and Work

As we begin the process of creating a working personal vision it is useful to recall our earlier examination as it related to the school-wide vision creation process. When we look at either individuals, classrooms or institutions that we could characterize as vision-driven, we see that their operating process move from R->X->O - references to actions to outcomes. Who they are and what they value drive their practice. On a personal level we could interchange R->X->O with the words Be-Do-Have. If we listen closely to many personal and institutional narratives we hear the reverse, that is – since we are/my life is/my situation is so..., then I have no choice but to do, react, cope in the ways I do, so..., then I/we can be OK/successful. However when we examine the ultimate results of a O->X->R or Have-Do-Be mode of operation we find that it is most often a formula for mediocrity and low quality.

The operating assumption being made here is that no matter how widely unique and varied each of us is and how each personality, set of fingerprints, and life's mission is distinctive to each of us, our true calling will include being excellent and sharing our gifts with others. The process of moving up the pathway (See Figures 2, 3 and 4 below) to excellence is inherently defined by an R->X->O orientation in which we start with cultivating high quality values and vision. Figure 1 offers a set of five universally limiting R's/reference and five universally elevating R's for your consideration.

**Figure 1: Five limiting R/references and the Five Elevating R/references Regarding our Personal Growth and Success.**

Five Limiters of our Growth and Success	Five Elevators of our Growth and Success
<p><b>#1 – Seeing yourself as a Victim.</b> A victim mindset is the antithesis of a leader mindset. When we start hearing ourselves say, “why aren’t things (the way they are supposed to be)” or “why do I always have such bad luck with. . .” we need to stop and hear the victim ego running the show. Recognize that in truth the only thing against you is your perception.</p>	<p><b>#1 – Giving yourself permission to be excellent.</b> How many excuses do you have running in your head for why you can’t be great? Why not lose all those agreements with mediocrity and accept that it is Ok to be excellent. That is not conceit, ambition or projecting superiority, it is just you accepting your true gifts and potential.</p>
<p><b>#2 – Being run by Toxic Narratives.</b> Listen to how you talk to yourself and others. How do you finish the phrases “the students at this school are . . .” and “the teachers at this school are. . .” Or my life is . . .” What kind of narratives do you hear? Narratives are when we make something conceptually solid in our thinking/R’s. What are the narratives that you would like to R/run you?</p>	<p><b>#2 – Tapping into your Personal Vision and sense of Purpose.</b> Do you have a sense of purpose that is at the core of who you are and why you make the choices you do? What is your picture of you and your school meeting its full potential? The more vivid that vision the stronger your commitment will be and as a result your passion, resilience, energy, and clarity as well.</p>

<p><b>#3 – Defaulting to Lower LOPs such as cleverness and coping.</b> Sometimes cleverness is useful and supports efficiently moving through life. But if it is a substitute for living from principles and a vision, it will lead to mediocrity and existence in the lower locations on the roadmap. We all need to cope, but do we have our eyes on the prize?</p>	<p><b>#3 – Using all experience for growth and learning.</b> Do we embody a growth-mindset? Avoid getting caught up in calling events either good or bad. They just happened and there is something to learn from them that will serve our growth and betterment. A grateful attitude is a powerful transformer.</p>
<p><b>#4 – Approaching things with a win-lose/me-they mentality.</b> Winning over another or a situation is mostly an illusion of the ego. When we beat someone, that losing energy is added to the overall mix of the whole as more negativity. So the question “how can I make this better,” is a much better question than “how can I win?”</p>	<p><b>#4 – Acceptance and not taking things personally.</b> Spend an hour in high judgment of others and yourself – how does it feel in your body? Now try to just allow and give up the judgment – how do you feel? Non-acceptance is paralyzing. In that accepting mindset you not only feel more alive but are actually more free, intuitive and experience more confidence to take positive action. Cultivating the skill of not taking things personally is enormously liberating.</p>
<p><b>#5 – Neglecting your body and health.</b> When we neglect our bodies we lose integrity and perspective as well as decrease our effectiveness. Exercise, meditate, take a walk, give yourself time to pay attention to your body’s needs. It will ground you in reality and help get you out of your head. Good health and the 1-Paradigm are best friends.</p>	<p><b>#5 – Feeding your spirit and level of mindfulness.</b> When we get out of our small thinking and pull back into the vast infinite intelligence and the wonder in life, we find perspective. For you is that mindfulness found in moments of silence and stillness, nature, prayer, meditation, a community/institution, books, unconditional loving others? When we bring mindfulness to our work we see more clearly the answers for how to move up our pathway most effectively.</p>

**Exercise 14.1: Creating Your Own Personal Vision**

Here we begin the process of creating a personal vision. There are many systems for going through such a process, but they will all inevitably involve a similar sequence of steps as is outlined here. It will benefit us to engage in this process periodically, as our vision will evolve over time.

**Step 1: Preparation and Getting our head and body in the right frame.**

Begin by disconnecting from all external distractions. Give you thinking a chance to quiet down. This may take some time. A useful strategy to support being undistracted is to sit in a chair alone and away from any electronics (no TV, cell phone, computer, music with words, etc.) and just get comfortable being alone with your thoughts. Have a pad of paper and a pen ready to write down ideas that emerge.

**Step 2: Listening to Your inner vision**

Begin this stage by letting your mind relax, and avoid “trying” to think. It will help to tune into an accepting mental space and let your goals and life situation subside for the time being. Feel into the reality that in the big picture you are accepted and fine the way that you are and life is basically good. Attending to nothing or only items from nature will be more conducive than looking at the stuff you see every day.

Give yourself 10 to 20 minutes to let the most immediate thoughts process. Most likely, after a while you will start to access more fundamental thoughts. A vision wants to emerge from you. You just need

to listen from the right place. Be patient and don't force the process. Assume that the first few thoughts will be less valid than those that come a little later, and will be come from a deeper and truer source.

When you feel like you are settled and feeling like life is on your side, then ask yourself some questions.

- What am I here on this planet to do? What is my mission?
- What are my unique gifts? And how could I best use them?
- What would I be doing and how would I be doing it, if I did what my heart was telling me to do?
- What are the most worthwhile goals and desires that want to emerge from me?

### **Step 3: Write down what comes to you**

Write down what comes to you as you answer these questions and listen for a vision for your life. It may be useful at this stage of the process to write down what you would call your R/principles. What are the few principles that you will use to guide your life and leadership? You may get ideas from the remaining pages of this chapter or the others, but try to make these guiding principles as personal and subjective to you as possible. You will live them to the extent that they come from your heart rather than just a sense that they *should* be valuable to you.

### **Step 4: Classifying your X's.**

Now reflect on the X aspect of your life and work. X's are all the actions, behaviors, habits, routines, patterns, practices in and out of work and ways of acting in which you currently have or might potentially in the future engage. As you reflect on your vision and values, you will better see each of these X's as being more or less consistent with whom you are becoming and that which will support your growth.

On a blank sheet of paper, draw a line down the middle and at the top label the two columns a) things I plan to keep doing, do more, or do better, and b) things I need to do less of or not at all. As with all lists generated within this process, this one will likely grow over time as more insights come to you.

This step in your personal vision setting process is the most important to your own growth, just as the collective X classification (i.e., things you will see/things you will not see done at the school) process will be in your school's growth process. Creating principles and goals is profoundly valuable and important, and may be challenging, but changing behavior is where the rubber meets the road. For our faculty this process is as difficult as anything they are asked to do, and for us personally, it will test our self-discipline and commitment to excellence daily. And just like in the school-level process, your greatest improvement will likely come from the X's that you recognize as having been holding you down and that you will want to stop doing, even more than the improvement encouraging ones that you identify as valuable additions.

### **Step 5: Putting our Desired O's into Perspective**

The last step in this process is to examine the O's/Outcomes that we would expect to occur as a result of living consistently with the R's and X's that we have committed to in the earlier steps. In this step, we are enhancing our vision with a practical representation of some of the ways that our commitment to our process values may out-picture. How will it look and feel as my vision becomes a reality?

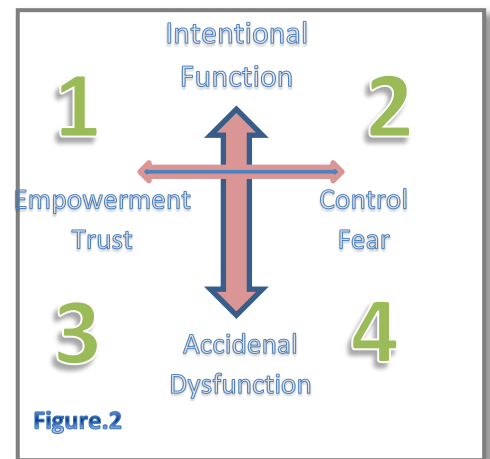
It is critical to keep in mind that in our personal process or in the one that we are leading at our school, becoming too emotionally and egoically attached to the outcome will be counter-productive and limit our success. Emotional attachment to the result typically leads to frustration, having our head in the

future, fearing failure, wishing and hoping, taking short-cuts, seeing people as a means to the end, and being unfaithful to our R's when it is convenient in the short-term among a hundred other drawbacks.

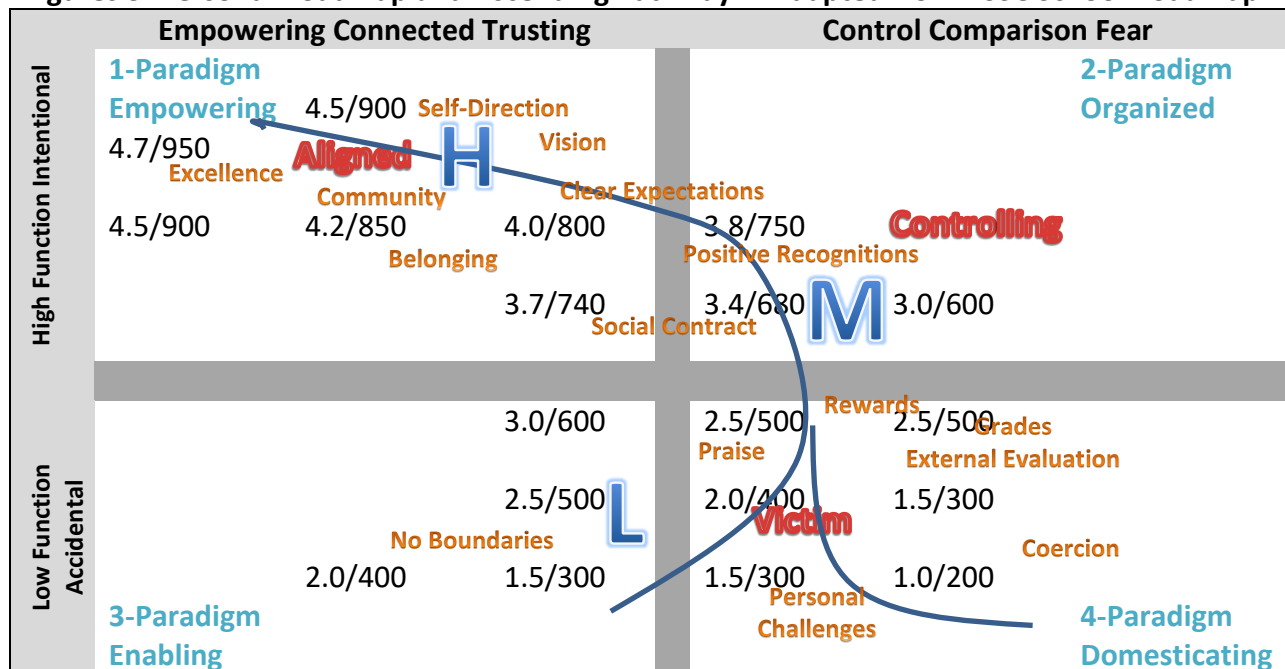
We might simply ask the question, "If I were to be faithful and committed to my stated vision (my guiding personal R's) and improved plan of action (more of some X's and less of others), what kinds of outcomes would I expect to see?" And we need to accept that we are only guessing at this, but there are logical effects from the causes that we are attempting to create. So while we will want to give up the need to control or be too attached to them, the O's that result from our actions will provide some data for our personal data-driven decision making.

### Creating our own personal pathway on the roadmap

As with our school's overall vision, we could place our own personal vision on the theoretical function and effectiveness roadmap (see Figure.2). In the following sections we will examine both the horizontal and vertical axes introduced earlier in the book, and explore how each relates to the various R's and X's that run our day to day lives. As you reflect on where you are and where you are intending to go on this roadmap (or any other roadmap), you might consider a couple of questions. First, do you see common characteristics between your own personal path and the path of your school? Second, do you find that you interpret the events in your life in and out of your job from the lens of the quadrant and within which paradigm you spend most of your time operating?



Figures 3: Personal Roadmap and Ascending Pathway – Adapted from ASSC School Roadmap



**Figure 4: Guiding Questions for Each Quadrant of the Roadmap**

	<b>Trust and Empowerment</b>	<b>Fear and Control</b>
<b>Function, Intention and Effectiveness</b>	<p><b>1-Paradigm Personal R's</b>  <i>Pulled by a vision of Excellence</i>                      I win the right way and with my team</p> <p>I trust the high quality processes I have found. The more I trust and focus on refining the process the better the outcomes get.</p> <p>Others are basically good if I let myself see them clearly. Everyone is on their own journey and is trying to get their needs met.</p> <p>I can feel a movement to a self-evident natural condition that feels internally right. Overall life is improving.</p>	<p><b>2-Paradigm personal R's</b>  <i>Working hard to make it happen</i>                      I need to do whatever it takes to win</p> <p>I make it happen with effort, telling, selling and policy. It mostly "works" for me.</p> <p>Others tend to be really helpful one moment and then let me down the next, if others were a little better my life would be better.</p> <p>I feel like I am having to work hard to keep everything together and working right, with moments of success and relief.</p>
<b>Dysfunction, Accidentalness and Ineffectiveness</b>	<p><b>3-Paradigm Personal R's</b>  <i>Letting life happen to me</i>                      One can't ever really win in the end</p> <p>There is really not a lot anyone can do to make things better.</p> <p>Others are doing their own thing. Who am I to judge, we all have to do what works for us.</p> <p>I feel like I can mostly just rely on myself and can't really relate to any definition of universal good or "the right way."</p>	<p><b>4-Paradigm Personal R's</b>  <i>In Opposition to a resistant world</i>                      I win and you lose</p> <p>If you don't take to the offense you will get run over by the system and all the predators out there.</p> <p>Others tend to be mostly confused, brainwashed, prejudice, losers, etc, if they were smart they would see how great I am and respect me.</p> <p>I feel like life is a struggle against so many oppositional forces, and overall the world seems to be getting progressively worse.</p>