

Where do you see yourself in 15 years' time?



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Go for a job interview and you may be asked the question “Where do you see yourself in 5 years’ time?” Hopefully, you have an answer that will tell the interviewer how committed you are to both your work and the industry.

But let me now ask you “Where do you see yourself in 15 years’ time?” When I asked this question of a group of executives during a recent leadership development workshop that I was running, the finance director answered that he didn’t know. He couldn’t come up with an answer. And he argued that he didn’t see the point of thinking that far ahead.

However, research based on something called Intentional Change Theory increasingly suggests that **individuals with a long-term vision of how they would like their lives to turn out have a greater chance of achieving this vision**. If life is like a journey, it’s the equivalent of having a direction for where you’re headed. You wouldn’t want to be directionless, would you?

The idea of a vision sounds terribly grand. But a vision is really only a picture or description of how we would like our lives to turn out.

In my work with senior executives, I use the term **Balanced Vision** because studies indicate that leaders are most able to make sustainable change in their lives when they consider all aspects of their lives, not just their careers. That means thinking about their families and friends, their health and their broader interests. For some, that may include a contribution to their communities, perhaps a sport or their spirituality or religion, for example.

How do you craft a vision? I have invited many executives to engage in what I say is a seemingly frivolous exercise: I ask them to dream about their perfect life. I say: “Imagine that it’s 20 years from now and your life has turned out perfectly. Everything has gone right and you’re feeling happy, satisfied and fulfilled. What are you doing? Who are you with? How do the people around you describe you?”

You need time to create a vision. It's not something that you can work on when you're feeling harassed and under pressure. It's a time out – an opportunity to reflect on how things are going and to be honest with yourself. What do you really want? Listen to that voice in your own head and not to the voices of colleagues, friends and loved ones. **Don't follow a prescribed career path because it's expected of you or because it's prestigious.**

Do you truly enjoy the path you're on? If not, why stay on it? You'll never compete with those who love, love, love what they do. Better to find your own niche. Then you can build up your skills, make plans to pursue the right kinds of opportunities and prioritise your efforts.

So what do you want from life? Once you know this, you can take the steps to work towards it. And, who knows? You might just achieve it.