



Different Has Arrived

VISIONING

BY TOM WENTZ

We ended the article in the March issue of *Agency Sales* magazine with the question, “**What does different look like?**” and I suggested that this is a very important question for every manufacturer, rep firm, agent, community, state and our nation. It is the single most important question for every young person today.

Have you ever asked your young son or daughter, “What are you going to be when you grow up?” How many answered, “A manufacturers’ rep?” What an amazing phenomenon that there are thousands of reps/agents like us and no child has ever answered the “Want to Be?” question with that answer. How did we get to *be* a rep/agent? How many of us graduated college with an engineering degree and hated the thought of *being* a salesperson? I did.

How does someone get to be a brain surgeon? An Olympic champion? A professional golfer? When does the vision begin to incubate? How are these people “different” from others? What does it take to be “different?” Is the same behavior true of an entrepreneur who starts his/her own rep firm?

My Champions Tour friend Rod Spittle came to me when he was 42 and wanted to be on the (then) Senior Tour when he was 50. He won his first tournament in San Antonio last October at the age of 54. Twelve years of working toward his vision finally paid off. Many people doubted that he’d make it. The odds were not in his favor. He not only had to defeat the former champions from the PGA Tour, but he had to defeat the qualifying system that was designed to keep him out.

“What Does Different Look Like?”

Different is biological. It is not about mechanistic perfection. The intellectual capital that is needed to run any business today is dispersed throughout the entire network (not supply chain) of companies who must co-operate and communicate in a very *different* way to build Boeing’s airplanes. It is impossible to think that Boeing can have all the engineering talent on its payroll and put out specifications for bid from vendors. They are totally interdependent on the intellectual capital of thousands of business partners that are dispersed around the world.

Dee Hock, Founder of VISA, made the following statement in his book *The Birth of the Chaordic Age*:

“This book is a story about the future, of something trying to happen, of a four-hundred year old age rattling in its deathbed as another struggles to be born — a transformation of consciousness, culture, society and institutions such as the world has never experienced.”

Dee suggests that *different* is being *born*. In the late 1990s a *transformation of consciousness, culture, society and institutions* was poking its head through the soil. Very few people were aware of the *transformation* that was emerging. One senior leader referred to Dee’s perspective as “that California crap.”

Boeing *gave birth* to the biological network that builds it planes. Wal-Mart *gave birth* to the biological network that supplies its stores. Starbucks and Dell *gave birth* to the networks that began to serve customers in a very different way. They did not arrive at the biological by working the mechanistic harder and faster to defeat the competition.

The most accurate vision of a biological organization is of an *energy field*. The physical appearance of a mechanistic organization and a biological organization might appear to be the same. You would not be able to tell them apart by looking at tangible assets, but the invisible energy field that is intrinsic to the biological organization is very different. When you interact with it, you can feel it. When you compete against it, you will be defeated by something you cannot see or understand.

In her book *Leadership and the New Science*, Margaret Wheatley makes the following statement about an energy field as a vision:

"If vision is a field, think about what we could do differently to use its formative influence. We would start by recognizing that in creating a vision, we are creating a power, not a place, an influence, not a destination. This field metaphor would help us understand that we need congruency in the air, visionary messages matched by visionary behaviors. We also would know that vision must permeate through the entire organization as a vital influence on the behavior of all employees. And we would feel genuinely threatened by incongruous acts because we would understand their disintegrating effects on what we dream to accomplish. We would become an organization of integrity, where our words would be seen and not just heard."

General Motors engineers toured the Toyota and Honda plants many times, but they could not copy the energy field that was intrinsic to the people.

Consider the quote by Michael Dell in his book *Direct From Dell*:

"A reporter once asked me which of our competitors represented the biggest threat to Dell. I said the greatest threat to Dell wouldn't come from a competitor. It would come from our people. I'm only concerned whether our people can execute our business model as we grow. It is not easy to maintain the "energy" of a focused team as we've expanded around the world."

Another excellent book that revealed the emergence of a biological vision is *New Rules for the New Economy* by Kevin Kelly, executive editor of *Wired* magazine. Kelly's book was first published in 1998, long before the current economic collapse. In the book he makes the following statement:

"We are now entering an era where change changes itself. As change accelerates itself, it morphs into creative destruction. It induces flux. It disperses into a field effect so you can't pinpoint causes. It overturns the old ways of change. Change in technological systems is becoming more biological. This will take a lot of getting used to. Networks actually grow. More and more biological metaphors are useful economic metaphors. The image (vision) of the economy as something alive is powerful."

Networks grow? Creative destruction? These are very strange concepts for the Industrial Age mind.

What is a *biological* system? It sounds so *un-business-like*.

Have you ever stubbed your toe? What did your mouth say? Ouch!!! Why does your mouth care about your toe? Your body is a biological system. It is connected with a nervous system.

I had first-hand experience with the Honda system for many years. Partners were on the design team two years before the new cars came to market. Hundreds of suppliers were within an hour of the plant in Marysville, Ohio, and would supply parts within hours of when they

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were to be installed in the car. This biological organization was connected with an information system long before today's Internet systems even existed.

Many companies today are once again beginning to think about growth. It is very difficult for the mechanistic business model to project organic growth when the economy is stagnant. The mechanistic growth model is through acquisition. In the mechanistic model there is little potential for organic growth unless it is taken from a competitor. To many manufacturers a rep is a cost and the mechanistic view is that the rep needs to be "incented" (to work harder) to grow.

The reverse is also true. Growth within the mechanistic rep organization is about acquiring more lines and a bigger territory. Everything is linear and incremental. Organic growth can only happen by taking it from the competition, and in a down economy that is almost impossible.

The mechanistic model dominates the thinking within many cities. For many cities growth (what is called economic development) is perceived to be a function of incenting (tax abatement) companies from the outside to relocate to the city. Cities that are growing in an organic way create the energy field that activates the creative potential of all citizens.

The question is not only, **"What does different look like?"** but do you and your total support team have the endurance and commitment to create toward the vision. As you can sense, a vision is only the antecedent for the journey ahead. The road to different right now is very long and there are many companies that are leading the way. Others are still waiting for the recession to end.

Speaking of waiting for things to turn around, my friend, the manufacturer who had trouble "thinking

about what he thinks about" called me yesterday and said, "Our company has announced a new vision at our national sales meeting." I asked what it was. He said, "To dominate the market." Then there was a long silence.

Finally, I asked, "Are you inspired?"

"No! I wasn't there. Only the reps were invited." Silence once again prevailed. "I heard that five years ago and we are still way behind the industry leader." He asked, "Do you think it is a vision?"

I asked, "Is that all there is to it?"

"We want to be a \$2-billion dollar business by 2015." I told him that is a measure, not a vision. Silence lasted for at least 10 seconds. I could hear someone in the background talking and he then asked me to hold.

I waited. When he returned, he apologized and said, "Let me call you back. Our sales rep is on the phone. He's quoting a big job and needs an estimated shipping cycle. I'll call you back. I have another question."

Can you see what's wrong? The reps are quoting jobs. As manufacturing he is a "functional part" within the mechanistic system that is not included in the sales meeting. The mechanistic business model is active and comes in over his phone every day and he does care, but I'm sure there are days when he doesn't say "ouch."

How would they ever change? Even if they could grasp the concept of a biological vision, how would they be able to suspend the reactive and begin to create something new and different?

The biological organization functions in a very different way. In our next article on **Different Has Arrived**, which will appear in a future issue of *Agency Sales*, we will examine how to activate this powerful energy field and create the alignment that will serve customers in a very different way. 