

# FUTURE PULL

## The Power of Vision and Purpose

By George Land and Beth Jarman

**A compelling vision can pull individuals and organizations to their desired futures.**

**"The purposiveness of all vital processes, the strategy of the genes and the power of the exploratory drive in animal and man, all seem to indicate that the pull of the future is as real as the pressure of the past." - Arthur Koestler (1905-1983)**

Master cellist Pablo Casals was once asked, "How are you able to play the cello with such magnificence?" He replied, "I hear it before I play it." Pole-vaulting champion John Uelses relies on a vivid image of winning to spur his performance, and golfer Jack Nicklaus says that vision "gives me a line to the cup just as clearly as if it's been tattooed on my brain. With that feeling, all I have to do is swing the clubs and let nature take its course."

**These are all examples of the phenomenon of Future Pull**, in which a blueprint of the future serves as the propelling force of creative change. Every single cell in a tree, in a caterpillar, or in a human being grows and develops not based on its history but by being pulled forward by its internal picture of the possible future. That future is inscribed in the DNA, the genes that reside in the nucleus of every cell. That way, every part of the system can pull together toward the common future. In human terms, this translates into living with a powerful vision of the future. The founders of Apple Computer committed themselves to a unique vision: "To change the world by empowering individuals through personal computing technology." They then used enormous energy in sharing this vision throughout their organization, with their customers, and within their communities. Their vision became not only the driving force of the organization, but the primary criterion by which to make decisions. Choices are made not just "by the book" but by the vision. The pull of the future thus takes precedence over the past. The Principles of Future Pull Individuals and organizations can harness the power of Future Pull by following a few principles: Know your vision and purpose, commit to achieve your vision and purpose, experience abundance as nature's natural state, and make the world a better place by living according to shared values.

**Know your purpose and vision.** Purpose can be defined as how an individual or organization makes the world a better place. A vision is a compelling image or picture of the purpose having been achieved. Landing a man on the moon in a decade was the vision that John Kennedy held out as an inspiring magnet pulling an entire nation to develop the technological capability for manned space flights.

**Purpose and vision are as important for individuals** as they are for nations and organizations. Actor John Mahoney did what others expected him to do for 37 years; he was miserable. Then one day, he realized that things could be different. He doesn't know where his excessive drinking and self-destructive bitterness would have taken him, but at the age of 48 he finally decided to follow his childhood dream of acting. At age 11, he fell in love with acting. He got involved in Community Theater doing Gilbert and Sullivan in summer festivals around England. He clearly knew then that acting was what he wanted to do with his life. He even quit high school to commit himself full time to acting. That's when the problems started. His parents protested with screaming and weeping. "At least finish high school," they said. "That's all we ask. Then you can do what you want to do with your life." It took 37 years, but Mahoney finally acknowledged that acting was his purpose in life. He developed his unique talents and skills and today has one of the busiest careers in Hollywood. "I'm finally doing what I want with my life," he says.

**A compelling purpose energizes life.** Without a compelling purpose, we live life as a fairly haphazard experience, being easily swayed by the latest fad, temporary pressures, or the most recent advice on what others think we ought to be doing with our lives. George Bernard Shaw believed the true joy in life was "being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy."

**Commit to achieve your vision and purpose.** The chief operating officer of a huge military-industrial company called together 300 of his top managers. Citing lagging profits and high costs, he told them, "The only purpose of this company is to make a top return on the capital invested. We're not around to build the best products." Little did he know that many of his top managers would leave within the year and that poor morale would sink even lower.

When an organization lacks a compelling purpose, its people cannot help but be uninspired. On the other hand, a leader committed to a forceful vision focuses the energies of the entire organization. Debbie Meier is trying to do nothing less than create a new system of public education in New York City's Harlem. She took on this daunting task because she truly cares that young people become critical thinkers and creative problem solvers. As superintendent, she insisted on overseeing the entire period of education, from kindergarten through high school, because she knew it required time to build these critical-thinking skills. Already, the results have been impressive. In the first year, a 5% turnover rate in her schools was one-tenth the citywide average. The dropout rate fell dramatically, and district wide test scores improved significantly.

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In 1976, Anita Roddick had a \$6,500 bank loan and an idea she loved: a business that would sell natural body-care products and that would care deeply about the environment, about its employees, and about its customers. She founded The Body Shop. Now, the organization's sales are approximately \$200 million a year, and Roddick's electricity and passion still infuse the enterprise. She says of the people she works with, "You want them to feel that they're doing something important, that they're not a lone voice, that they are the most powerful, potent people on the planet."

Abundance is nature's natural state. Abundance comes to those who have the courage to follow their dreams. This brings not only material abundance but connection with the opportunities that are vital to the full expression of one's talents.

Today, thousands of people are doing what they love to do in the most unlikely occupations and making an excellent living. One woman we know loved making unusual sounds with a variety of percussion instruments that she invented. Strange as these sounds were to many non-musicians, she has now introduced her percussion sounds into symphonic music. Her travels take her worldwide playing with various international orchestras.

Phil Bryson was only 13 when he started rock climbing. "By the time I was through college," he says, "I recognized that my real life's work somehow had to be in sharing what I had experienced in my rock climbing. I was committed to offering people the excitement of realizing they could break through their self-imposed limitations to be more than they ever dreamed possible. I had absolutely no idea how I could make a living doing it, but I decided to go for it." Bryson's company, On the Edge Productions, is now 13 years old, and more than 100,000 people have taken his life-changing ropes courses.

No one with a compelling purpose and a great vision knows exactly how it will be achieved. You have to be willing to follow an unknown path, allowing the road to take you where it will. Surprise, serendipity, uncertainty, and the unexpected are guaranteed on the way to the future. Make the world a better place by living according to shared values. Values are often thought of as the soft stuff of an organization, something that goes on a bronze plaque in the front corridor. Somehow the values get separated from how the business really runs. Inevitably, employees and customers know it.

When Robert Haas became chairman and CEO of Levi Strauss and Co., the company had a long tradition of treating employees fairly, providing for their welfare, and actively supporting the community. But, he says, "What really mattered was getting pants out the door." Haas felt that if that attitude continued employees would stop believing in the company. Levi Strauss was willing to bring its aspirations and values into alignment with its actions, both within the company and outside with vendors, customers, and the community.

Ivan Blostone, former president of Leaseways Worldwide Leasing Operations, took a newly formed company in 1960 and achieved close to \$1 billion in sales by 1970 because he hired people with common values who were committed to telling the truth in meeting their customers' needs. Instead of selecting employees primarily because of their technical competence and appearance, he added two critical components- shared values and behavior. By organizing work groups around self-managed teams with common values, their contribution to making the world a better place was greatly increased.

The purpose and values are the heart of the vision that will pull organizations to their future. These ingredients provide the essential elements of successful self-creation: the picture of that future whole. It is the internal guidance system, the DNA that allows everything to work together. The purpose, vision, and values furnish the internal reference point for making choices and connections in a complex and rapidly changing world. They endow the individual and the organization with direction to be pulled to the future.