



The Building  
Community Institute

4870 S. Lewis Avenue, Suite 203  
Tulsa, Oklahoma, 74105  
888-388-6348  
[www.cliffontaulbert.com](http://www.cliffontaulbert.com)

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## A SHARED VISION IS POWERFUL

It was raining. I was cold. I waited until the man buzzed the door open. I then walked to another building where a pass was required and from there, along a narrow concrete walk to another gate that had to be buzzed open leading to another gate that was pad-locked. Finally, someone came along with a key that worked. Within minutes I was in an educational module in one of our western prisons. I was talking to a group of inmates, who after several layers of training would become leaders among their fellow inmates. I spoke to the importance of having a "Shared Vision" if they were to become effective leaders and experience sustainable success. "Leadership is not a Marathon Race and Leaders are not Marathon Runners," started my conversation. I wanted them to understand that effective leadership is not about being out front with a badge and a title and special privileges, but that it is about Bringing Others Along through dialogue and consensus. The men understood that a Marathon Runner focused on her or himself. They knew that these runners were not in the race to see that others win. The inmates got the picture! Now, how do we elevate ourselves beyond this "marathon" type of self-focused leadership thinking?

### We Embrace, Articulate and Live by a Shared Vision!

A Shared Vision is powerful, however, is not automatic! I wanted the men at the prison to understand that each one of them would have different ideas and plans, but if they were to be effective, they would have to come to consensus about the Vision that would drive their daily actions. It is no different for us who are on the outside. Being driven by a "Shared Vision" impacts our behavior and the tone of our conversation. It's no longer about one person and his or her personal point of view. We are now being driven by an inner force and a shared point of reference. A "Shared Vision" is developed over time and through much dialogue and compromise (consensus).

The process of creating a "Shared Vision" is its sustaining strength! At the end of the day, we remember the journey and the relationships we built along the way. In the prison, the men came from different backgrounds, different levels of education, ethnic differences and much more. But I encouraged them to embrace their different perspectives as unique gifts to bring to the process—a process that overtime, would grow them beyond being independent silos into a leadership fraternity. The "Shared Vision" once developed and accepted, would help them to not be trapped by narcissism and self-importance, but grow into leaders who were unified, strong in their resolve to live by their principles and create meaningful relationships.

It was a good training day. The rain stopped. And I was released by simply giving them back their pass. As I processed my talk with the inmates, I realized we too, ought to embark upon this same dynamic process. And as the news on the car radio brought me back to our nation and our woes, I realized that our success is dependent upon our embrace of a "Shared Vision." Fortunately, this recognition came early in our nation's history. The original independent colonies eventually became a nation as their leaders recognized their need of each other and overtime developed a "Shared Vision" for their future. It didn't happen automatically! Recognizing their common need spurred conversation and dialogue and eventually compromise of ideas. And the compromise was not a case of throwing in the towel, but one of hot debate, rebuke, honest disagreement, enlightened moments and the foresight to imagine a better future.

As our nation, our businesses and our families go through this economic crisis, this becomes the time to remember our nations' "Shared Vision" and the journey taken to get us to this time in history. It's not the time for leaders or individual citizens to act as Marathon Runners, but to see all of our positions beyond that of a 'race of words' and 'personal ideologies.' As I told the men in prison, their personal leadership will be measured not by what they say, but what they do and how they allow the "Shared Vision" to impact their lives and behavior. It is no different for us...parents, politicians, educators, bankers, factory workers, writers, actors, social workers, faith leaders, students and government employees, we all function best when we are being unselfishly driven. And this is what a "Shared Vision" brings to the community—an opportunity to personalize unselfishness. A shared vision is indeed quite powerful. A few centuries ago, it managed to take thirteen independent colonies and create one nation we call home. It may not be a bad idea for leaders and the citizenry to follow this model again.

- Clifton L. Taulbert