



Creating Your Relationship Vision

Peter Pearson, Ph.D
445 Burgess Dr Suite 150 • Menlo Park, CA 94025
650.327.5915
www.couplesinstitute.com

Creating Your Relationship Vision

By Peter Pearson, Ph.D.

In our work with couples we like to help them formulate a vision of the kind of life they would like to create together. A powerful vision involves recalling and revising the important dreams you had when you first got together and identifying new hopes as well. Sometimes this means exploring “little buds” that are unconscious, but waiting to blossom.

A vision contains something you really want and evokes enough passion that you are willing to invest sustained effort to bring it about. Your vision contains strong desires that are aligned with your values and supported by a plan.

But it’s not easy to come up with your vision. This handout contains four separate sections, each designed to help you define a different aspect of your vision:

1. **Questions** to develop your personal and relationship vision;
2. **Integrity**: closing the gap between how you currently function and how you aspire to be;
3. **Encouragement and Empathy**: giving your partner ongoing support and understanding the effect of your actions on your partner;
4. **Different categories** of life that could profit from a vision

Review the entire document before starting. It will give you a multi-dimensional view on the future you seek to create together.

Couples will often spend more time deciding on a movie than discussing their future. For some couples these exercises may create anxiety. That’s understandable. Take a deeper breath, choose a time to start knowing you will not get through this like a short quiz from Reader’s Digest.

Your future is worth it.

Good luck.

Good questions to Develop Your Personal and Relationship Vision

To think creatively about the type of relationship you desire, ask each other a few of the following questions on a dinner date, or set up a special time to explore these together.

Even better, write out your responses as you will most likely forget them soon after a discussion or reflecting on them. Plus — writing them will help enormously to clarify your thinking.

Your responses will help you connect on a deeper level than the usual topics of careers, kids, vacations, politics, and movies. They can illuminate areas of joy, passion, and connection. Most couples ask each other questions like these when they first meet, but as time hurtles by and life's demands pile up, these meaningful questions get neglected and then abandoned.

They'll be the starting point for an interesting and stimulating conversation that will create the foundation for your vision. The more detail your vision has, the more compelling it will be.

Getting to Know You — Again

- ▶ What things in your life bring you the greatest pleasure?
- ▶ What things do you look forward to each day?
- ▶ What excites you about the future?
- ▶ In what settings are you the happiest and most comfortable?
- ▶ On your drive to work, what consumes your mind the majority of the time?
- ▶ In a regular day, what do you find yourself thinking about the most in addition to work?
- ▶ If you could change one or two things in your life, what would they be, and why?
- ▶ What is something that could have happened but never happened in your life that you are grateful for?
- ▶ What accomplishments do you value most in your life so far?
- ▶ If you had three wishes that would come true, what would they be?
- ▶ When you reach the rocking chair stage of your life, what do you wish you had done that you didn't do?
- ▶ Is there a belief or attitude that seems to interfere with creating or pursuing a big dream?
- ▶ What activities do you most like to do by yourself?

- ▶ What are a couple things that you appreciate about our relationship, and why do these things seem significant?
- ▶ How strong is your desire to do something with together?
- ▶ Describe a memory of a time when you felt like we collaborated well.
- ▶ What kinds of projects or activities would you consider doing together?
- ▶ What projects or activities do you think we do well together?
- ▶ What talents or strengths do you believe we each bring to a future project?
- ▶ Ask your partner, "What do I do that brings out the best in you?"
- ▶ **Bonus Question:** What would be the next step you suggest we take from here?

Here are some guidelines to help you get the most out of these conversations:

- ★ Treat your partner's answers with respect.
- ★ Please don't argue or negatively judge any of your partner's responses.
- ★ Be like a compassionate reporter who is exploring an unknown subject.
- ★ Ask your partner to do the same for you.
- ★ You will be delicately ferreting out the overlap in all the answers to arrive at what is most meaningful to each of you. Don't simply race through the questions. This process takes time and dedication, yet returning to these questions will pay huge dividends in your life together.

Sarah and Jim are a couple who used this exercise repeatedly over time. From the beginning Sarah answered what excited her about the future was the thought of "leaving a legacy."

Jim responded to the question of what kinds of projects or activities he would consider doing together by saying that he'd like to work on something together for the well-being of their children. As they asked each other these questions again and again, their responses evolved.

Their answers would incubate and stimulate additional ideas. One session would prove to be a springboard for the next. Sara and Jim eventually decided they wanted to do something for their children, which also met Sarah's desire to leave a legacy.

Their answers kept returning to doing something that reflected their interest in teaching and strengthening the family. They both believed the old saying that if you really want to learn something, then you should teach it.

They decided to begin with teaching a Sunday school class together. After sitting through some tedious Sunday school classes when they were children, they decided they would make it enjoyable for themselves and the kids. They became increasingly passionate about creating a very different learning experience for kids in Sunday school.

In the beginning, they did not discuss potential obstacles. Because the best way to kill a budding dream is to ask how it could possibly happen. Rather, Sarah and Jim jumped in and discovered they enjoyed teaching together.

Through trial and error, they learned a lot about collaborating and how to better negotiate when they had sharp differences of opinion.

However, they also discovered they did not like the bureaucracy telling them what to teach.

Over time they kept returning to their vision questions. Eventually, they started a small, interfaith Sunday school with other families who had a similar vision. The project was more work than they had anticipated. Much more. But the work they had put into building a collaborative vision and learning to negotiate sustained them through the tougher times.

You will know you have accurately described your vision when:

- ★ The results are hard to achieve; success will require “stretching.”
- ★ You are excited when you think about it.
- ★ The results of the vision are meaningful to you.
- ★ The results make a difference in your life and your partner’s life.
- ★ The results are visible, can be written down, and, at least to some degree, can be measured.

The results will reflect your strengths and core values.

Your vision will evolve as you move toward it. You will meet obstacles along the way.

Ask yourself an important question: “What will I have to do that I don’t want to do to realize this vision?” Every worthwhile vision carries with it some undesirable tasks. Don’t let these make you believe your vision is wrong. Accept that your vision will involve some challenges that you won’t enjoy.

Realizing your vision as a couple will require new skills in problem solving, negotiation, and decision making. They’re not always intuitive.

Unfortunately, some attitudes may get in the way of constructing or realizing your own vision. Examples are:

- ▶ I can't really have what I want.
- ▶ I want something only if someone else wants it, too.
- ▶ What I want is not that important.
- ▶ Even if I begin, I will eventually fail.
- ▶ My partner will laugh at it or not be supportive.
- ▶ I can't stand how anxious I feel when imagine getting what I want.
- ▶ I feel guilty for wanting too much.

If you can't construct a vision, start writing down what kind of job, family, marriage, or career you would absolutely hate to have. Take, for example, the worst job you can imagine. Write down all the qualities, conditions, and situations that would make for a very, very miserable working experience, then reverse the qualities and characteristics to create the vision of your ideal job.