

Leadership success always starts with vision. Nelson Mandela dreamed of a South Africa in which blacks and whites would enjoy the same rights. John F. Kennedy dreamed of putting a man on the moon. Wendy Kopp was still a college student when she dreamed of strengthening disadvantaged schools throughout the United States with a cadre of young, enthusiastic teachers. A compelling vision has that power. It inspires, clarifies, and focuses the work of individual leaders—and, many times, millions of people.

From the President



Staying invested in a vision can be extremely difficult when hard times arrive, as they have with the global economic crisis of the past year. The day-to-day work of keeping your organization afloat can be all-consuming. But the recession will end eventually. When it does, will you be poised to take advantage of new opportunities? Do you have a vision that will inspire your colleagues and your customers?

I recently met with a group of outstanding college students in North Carolina. As we talked, the importance of personal vision, coupled with persistence, emerged as a major theme. We all have dreams as young children. But as we get a little older, we let people talk us out of these visions. By the time many of us have reached high school—or even well before—we’re already focusing on our limitations. It doesn’t have to be that way.

In reflecting on the many great leaders I’ve been privileged to study or work with, I find that their success usually comes down to a few key elements. They gravitate toward the activities they are most passionate about—as opposed to the ones that pay the most money or are forced on them by someone else. They have a growth mind-set, they establish challenging goals, and they pursue those goals relentlessly.

When Wendy Kopp envisioned the creation of Teach for America in her undergraduate senior thesis at Princeton University in 1989, her odds of success were slim. Even her own academic adviser called the idea “quite evidently deranged.” Why would the nation’s top college graduates give up a couple of years of their lives to teach in the nation’s worst schools? But Kopp had formed a powerful vision, and her persistence in realizing it was just as strong. She raised \$2.5 million in start-up funds, assembled a staff, and launched a grass-roots campaign to recruit teachers. Her journey since then has not always been smooth, but she has kept her eyes on her ultimate goal: creating a better future for Americans through a better education. And she’s getting results.

Kopp’s remarkable career started with a vision. What’s yours?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John R. Ryan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John R. Ryan, president and CEO, CCL

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