

S E S S I O N 3

What is My Vision?

Session Objectives

- To discuss what is a personal vision.
- To consider how an individual's dream or vision motivates her to become a leader.
- To discover the power of formulating a concrete statement or mission that explains one's vision.
- To explore how to put one's personal vision into words and actions.

Suggestions for Facilitation

Read aloud the following story about Muhammad Yunus' vision for affecting socio-economic justice in Bangladesh through small bank loans. Discuss as a group the financial problem he identified among the poor, and particularly among women, and the vision he had to rectify it. After the group has considered the questions that follow Muhammad Yunus' story, have participants share their own vision for affecting change. This exercise is designed to assist participants in formulating a personal vision statement.

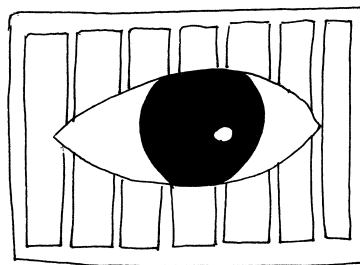
Partnering the participants during this exercise may help them feel more comfortable sharing their personal vision statements with one another (see Appendix B for more on this facilitation tactic).

I See No Reason Why Anyone in the World Should Be Poor

Muhammad Yunus: Economist

Muhammad Yunus returned to Bangladesh from the United States nine months after his homeland gained its independence in 1971. While he was teaching Economics at Chittagong University, his compatriots were suffering from war and famine—realities that punctured his belief in solving problems from inside the classroom. He decided to talk with people from the village next to the university to understand their trials and tribulations.

Yunus met a woman making bamboo stools and it was her dilemma that led him to reexamine the sources of poverty. She had no money to buy her bamboo and had to borrow from a trader who, in turn, bought her stools at a price that he determined. Tempted to give the woman the twenty cents she



needed to buy the bamboo, Yunus instead devised a larger plan, asking a student to compile a list of those villagers needing money. To his surprise, forty-two hard-working people needed a total of twenty-seven dollars in order to sell their products at a reasonable price. Lending the villagers the money and letting them repay him whenever possible, Yunus was inspired to consider how he could help further. He sought to convince a bank on the university campus to lend money to the villagers, but the bank manager rejected the idea because he perceived poor people, particularly poor women, as not being credit-worthy.

Undaunted, Yunus established the Grameen Bank on his own in 1983 with some initial backing and government permission. The Grameen Bank began offering business loans to the poor, especially to women. Persuading them to accept the loans required persistence; a man was not even supposed to address a woman in public. At first, the women insisted that they had no ideas for business and that the bank should give the money to their husbands. Gradually, Yunus was able to convince them to borrow money in groups of five to set up their own small businesses. These women then encouraged their friends to accept loans too. When the women repayed the loans, they realized that they could care for themselves and their families.

While aid programs and non-governmental organizations elsewhere have emulated Grameen, Yunus reminds skeptics that, “poverty is not created by poor people...[but] by the institutions we have built around us. We must

go back to the drawing board to redesign those institutions so that they do not discriminate against the poor as they do now.” Yunus’ mission to eradicate poverty is now global in scope. He says, “It is the responsibility of all societies to ensure the human dignity of every member of that society... We talk about human rights, but we don’t link human rights with poverty... If we create institutions capable of providing business loans to the poor for self-employment, they will see the same success we have seen in Bangladesh. I see no reason why anyone in the world should be poor.”¹²

Muhammad Yunus is the founder of Grameen Bank. Today, Grameen works in 36,000 villages in Bangladesh, has 2.1 million borrowers, and employs 12,000 people. Grameen-style programs now operate in 56 countries. Since the 1990s, Grameen has branched out into sectors beyond banking including electrification, Internet provision, and wireless telecommunications as part of its effort to empower villagers in Bangladesh.

Questions for Discussion

- What circumstances inspired Muhammad Yunus to formulate his vision? What is the immediate problem affecting the poor that he sought to address?
- What was the solution he identified? What beliefs about human nature motivated Yunus?
- How does he envision his own role in implementing this solution? What leadership qualities does Yunus exhibit in his quest to eliminate poverty? Do you believe he demonstrated principled leadership?
- Could a woman have achieved the same objectives as Yunus? Why or why not? What would you do if faced with a similar situation?
- Do any of Yunus’ statements above succinctly capture the problem, the solution, and his own role in what he proposes? Does this comprise a compelling vision statement? Why or why not?
- Did Yunus’ vision change over time? Was it important that it change?
- Do you think Yunus’ vision of loans is specific to women? Why or why not?
- What is the women’s skill referred to in the Grameen Bank scenario? Does this skill help women move away from their traditional roles or knowledge base?
- What kind of system of loans would help strengthen not only women’s economic capacities but also help empower them and strengthen their role in their communities?
- Did Yunus’ vision statement help clarify his objectives?
- What does the term “vision” mean to you?
- Why is a vision statement important?

¹² The information on Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank is taken from “Muhammad Yunus, Grameen Bank,” in Michael Collopy and Jason Gardner, ed., *Architects of Peace: Visions of Hope in Words and Images*, Navato, CA: New World Library, 2000, p. 77 and <http://www.grameen.org/>.

Exercise: Formulating a Personal Vision Statement

Allow approximately forty-five minutes for this exercise.

1. Break the group into teams of two or three to discuss among themselves the following: Identify a situation, condition, or problem in your family or community that you wish you could change. What changes would you like to see to improve this situation, condition, or problem?
2. Each member of the team conveys to her teammates in one or two minutes how she would go about directing or participating in the implementation of the solutions she has described.
3. Each member formulates in writing a brief statement—one or two sentences—that describes her vision for her own role in making the needed changes she has identified.
4. The whole workshop group reconvenes in a circle. Starting with the facilitator, each person reads her personal statement to the group.

At the end of this exercise, the facilitator should collect each person's written statement. Make sure that everyone has written her name on her statement because they will be used again in Session 7.

Observations

- Was it difficult to formulate your personal statement? Why or why not?
- Does developing a personal statement help clarify your own objectives?
- Do you imagine that your personal vision might change over time? Why or why not?
- How did you feel hearing the personal statements of others in the group?
- Why is it important to put this vision in writing and/or to articulate your vision aloud to others?