

# Commitment and Clarity of Intention

By Richard Noble

If you ask what qualities people respect in employees and leaders you will likely hear a list that includes commitment. It's common to see posters on office walls attempting to inspire commitment, along with other values such as excellence or teamwork. The question that comes to mind is, "to what are we being asked to commit?"

Certainly, in today's downsized organizations, commitment to tasks and priorities is needed. Yet, that form of commitment is more like dedication to the requirements of the organization, which frequently leads to resentful compliance. Additionally, commitment to short-term tasks, by definition, is short-term, and requires constant rekindling. The key is to recognize that deep, long-term commitment does not stand alone. It needs a partner. The value of linking the broader meaning and context to individual actions, through creating visions and success factors, has long been proven in organizations.

Individuals have gained tremendous insight and greater personal value by becoming more clear on their intentions and focusing on them while taking action. The partner of commitment is, therefore, clear intention.

You may recall the movie *The Karate Kid*. In the film the title character arrives at the home of his teacher to begin karate lessons, only to be given a series of chores. Day after day the boy hand-sands decks, paints fences and waxes cars until he becomes enraged with his teacher. When he confronts the master by angrily demanding to be taught karate, not forced to perform odd jobs, the master demonstrates how the actions required to sand, paint and wax are also ideal in strengthening the boy's muscles and in disciplining his body to perform karate movements.

The boy appeared to complete each job with commitment; yet without the partner of clear intention, he was ready to quit, convinced that the teacher was a fraud.

It wasn't until he understood the deeper intention, that the tasks made sense. How might knowing the intention in advance have effected the attitude and willingness of the boy? The student was dependent on the teacher to provide him with the intention. His focus on the immediate task pre-vented him from understanding the connection between the chores and learning karate. Too often people wait for the organization to enlighten us, rather than clarifying our own intentions, and using the situation to greater advantage. Just as visions become more clear as we make progress toward them, clarifying intentions is an ongoing process requiring constant refinement.

Many, however, settle for what they want in the moment and loose sight of deeper intentions. Recently, I was providing coaching to a client changing careers to become an internal consultant. While leading a group in a consulting intervention, he was succeeding in guiding the group, until he was asked a question. Immediately, he interpreted the question as a challenge of his ability, felt insecure, and became defensive. He cut off the question, ignored the person's issue and moved back to the immediate task. Later, when

we discussed what happened, I asked what his intention was in that moment. After thinking, he said that it was to get through the intervention. Prior to the session, his intentions were to learn more about being an effective consultant and to be focused on the broader context of the client's situation. Seeing the bigger picture (being appreciative of the client's issues, how the intervention fit in the client's context and pursuing why the person would be asking that question) would lead the consultant to deal with the situation more productively. When I reminded him of his original intentions he was able to see how a focus on the deeper intentions and context would have contributed to accomplishing his original intentions.

All of us become distracted and reactive. As the adage goes, we lose sight of the forest through the trees.

The practice of:

1. Clarifying intentions
2. Maintaining a focus on intentions
3. Being open to the broader contextual possibilities of situations
4. Seeking linkage between current tasks or circumstances and the intentions
5. Maintaining the commitment to take action that contribute to accomplishing the intentions, ... can be significant in achieving higher levels of productivity, and satisfaction.