

GETTING CLARITY ON YOUR VISION: AN INTERVIEW WITH PATRICK BYRNE

By Joelle K. Jay, Ph.D.

As the CEO of Overstock.com, a billion dollar business and the number one shopping destination online, Patrick Byrne is a leader with many different hats. He sees himself as a teacher and a student, a coach and also a player, the head of a major corporation and yet still an entrepreneur. I talked to Patrick about his views about these different roles to learn more about what it looks like for him to practice personal leadership.

Joelle: How do you view your role as a leader?

Patrick: There are different modalities for being a leader. Good leaders can not only lead in different conditions, but they also change the kind of leaders they are under different conditions. For instance, in a perfect world I view my role as a coach. We have the right people in the right jobs, and I'm spending time with people to coach them and help them develop.

However, there are times when you come under stress where you have to step to the fore and get in the game yourself. You can't be the coach at that moment. You have to be out on the playing field, grabbing the ball. You have to be able to show your players that you can step in and play different roles and do them well.

Joelle: How does your view of the vision change as you take on these different roles?

Patrick: I remember Zig Ziglar once said, if you're not clear about what your purpose is or what your target is you have no chance of hitting it. As the leader of a big organization, it's up to me to know and communicate that target. Sometimes it's uncomfortable to do that. Maybe the target seems impossible, or maybe people understand that it's going to be costly and difficult to get there. As the leader of the company, I have to have almost a comfort with confrontation and with the challenges to the vision. The act of leadership means you're going to demand that people strive.

But just as I have to help other people see that vision, I have to stay committed to it myself. In this role, I become the entrepreneur constantly reaching for that next horizon and driving toward it every day.

I've had cancer three times. Each time I recovered I took a bike ride across the states, from California to New York. As I was bicycling I used to think about the Atlantic Ocean. I'd think to myself, "As long as I'm pointed east and I'm still pedaling I have to be getting closer."

In business, this same kind of ongoing commitment to following the right direction has to be a habit, a personal characteristic. We don't have that same kind of concrete destination, but we do have a vision, and we have to keep moving towards it. Entrepreneurs have to overcome insurmountable obstacles. We have to keep on pushing ourselves. Once in awhile someone invents something that's intrinsically a brilliant idea, but it really is the perspiration that makes it happen. It's perspiration in the face of not knowing if you're going to succeed. It's not knowing how high the rock face is that you're going to climb, but you're going to keep climbing anyway.

Joelle: How do you do that? How do you keep going with that kind of commitment when you can't don't even know how far away the destination is, or whether you can make it?

Patrick: I definitely think visualization is important. It's a key ability, because if you can't visualize what it is you're working toward its hard to stay focused and driven.

I've used visualization in sports. Now I tend to visualize meetings and rehearse meetings in my head before I do them. In business, you're on a high wire without a net. You're not just following through on someone else's vision. You have to create and follow through on your own.

Practicing visualization as Patrick describes it is one of the most powerful habits a leader can develop. As you can see from Patrick's description, following through on that vision takes doggedness, commitment, and active ongoing participation.

That's why *getting clarity* is such a vital part of personal leadership. You've got to get clear on your vision so you can head towards it, and you've got to get clear on it again and again on every step of the way. That can be tricky when, as Patrick points out, the role you play as a leader is constantly shifting. Look at the different ways clarity can help you succeed in those roles.

- As a business owner or president, are you clear about the direction of the business?
- As an organizational leader, are you clear on about how to align people toward the vision?
- As a coach, are you clear about what people need from you in order to be successful?
- As an employee, are you clear about where you should be putting your efforts and when?
- As an individual, are you clear about what you are doing *right now* and how it is getting you to the long term vision?

As a leader, you play *all* of these roles. Practicing the skill of getting clarity will help you succeed in every one.

And if you want to practice the strategies of visualization that will help you gain that clarity, you will find them in *The Inner Edge: The 10 Practices of Personal Leadership* (www.TheInnerEdge.com). Be sure to visit the website, where you will find three different audio visualization guides in the section called Resources for Readers.



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