

Be an ACE - Turn Vision Into Reality

Everyone knows what it means to ace an exam, ace a project, or ace an interview. It means that you did really well. In part, Webster's online dictionary defines "ACE" as: a point scored especially on a service (as in tennis or handball) that an opponent fails to touch; a golf score of one stroke on a hole; a combat pilot who has brought down at least five enemy airplanes; and one that excels at something. An ACE is the most valuable card in a deck of cards. An ACE is one who is regarded as a pro at whatever he or she does. Being an ACE connotes mastery of something and performance at a high level.

The idea of being an ACE appeals to most of us, because there is something in us that wants to perform at a high level. Most of us have enjoyed an experience being an ACE in some context. Sometimes we may view our performance as luck like making a hole in one in golf. But to ACE anything, there is some measure of skill and preparation.

Being an ACE at anything is the process of turning vision into reality. No one can really excel at anything without a vision of what they want to achieve. Solomon tells us that: **"Where there is no vision, the people perish..."**¹ In other words, when we don't have a revelation of why we are here and what we are to do, there is no life in us. The story of Queen Esther illustrates this point. Having been granted the royal position of queen after Vasthi defied the will of the king, Esther finds her people, the Jews, under a judgment of death at the wicked hands of Haman. Knowing that the king endorsed Haman's edict and that the king's endorsement cannot be rescinded, she was at a crossroads. Her cousin Mordecai provided the vision she needed. He noted that she, of all the Jews, was in a position to influence the king. Mordecai challenged Esther to think beyond herself and risk her life to save her people. The book of Esther records the challenge, **"Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape? For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"**² Esther embraced the challenge and immediately began clarifying the vision. To clarify

¹ Proverbs 29:18 (KJV)

² Esther 4:12 - 14

the vision, she needed to understand out to bring deliverance to the Jews. Specifically, she had to persuade the king to issue another edict that would allow the Jews to defend themselves. Having clarified the vision, she now needs a plan that embraces the brutal reality of the moment, but facilitates turning the vision into reality. A key step in the plan was to gain an audience with the king, which could have been her demise, had the king not granted that she live. In the end, Esther is the vessel of deliverance. She turned vision into reality by acquiring vision, clarifying vision, and executing to achieve the vision. In other words, she was an ACE.

An ACE is therefore one who:

A – acquires a vision

C – clarifies the vision

E – executes the vision

One person who was an ACE in life was John Wanamaker. Born in Philadelphia in 1838, early in life John had a vision to be in the retail business and through out his life he clarified and executed this vision. At the age of 12, he had defining moment buying his mother a Christmas gift at a jewelry store. After making a selection and while the store keeper was wrapping the gift, John saw an item that he thought his mother would like better. However, the store keeper rebuffed his effort to exchange the gift. This experience profoundly shaped John. He resolved that when he owned his own store he would treat people kindly and fairly. At age 16, he was hired to clean brass knobs at an upscale clothing store. Soon he moved into sales and then manager. In 1861, at age 23, he started his own store with his brother-in-law. By 1872, he was the sole owner, due to the death of his brother-in-law, of the largest retailer in the land. In 1876, he combined a number of specialty stores into one facility creating the world's first department store. But this wasn't his only first. He pioneered price tags, single pricing, merchandise guarantees, returns and exchanges, electric lights, air conditioning, weather forecasts, telegraph service, employee benefits (vacation, education assistance, health care, pension, life insurance), music in the store, newspaper ads, white sales, etc. In all of this, he never forgot the driving vision of treating customers fairly and kindly.

Do you want to be an ACE in life who turns vision into reality like John Wanamaker? If so, the starting point is vision. Vision is rooted in the heart. John's experience with buying a gift for his mother, though negative, put a vision and resolve in

his heart. He determined that he was going to have a store and treat people kindly and fairly. Not everyone has a vision. Many young people go to college with very little vision about their lives. I have seen people in their 40s and 50s with very little sense of destiny and purpose. These people are typically frustrated with life and tend to drift aimlessly. Some people enter into a phase known as mid-life crisis, which is characterized by regression to dreams of younger days. However, those in this phase don't display clarity of vision. A common vision in America today is retirement. Work hard for 40 or 50 years and retire. Better yet, win the lottery and thumb your nose at your job as you go to pick up your check. I'm being facetious. The point is that many of us do not have a vision of life with any significance. Vision is attained by diligently seeking out why we were created. Within each of us there is longing to know who we are, why we are here, and what we are to do. It is such a fundamental component of the human condition that acquiring vision seems to be a prerequisite for finding peace and contentment.

But having vision is not enough. The vision must be sharpened and focused. John Wanamaker spent his life clarifying his vision. First, there was vision to be in the retail business and to treat people kindly and fairly. Then there was vision to own his own store and then there was vision for a department store. In of these steps was part of the process of clarifying vision. For most of us, it is a process of experience and maturity. If we correctly interpret our experiences, we discover our strengths and weaknesses. John undoubtedly failed along the way, but he chose to learn from these mistakes. Like all of us John naturally gravitated to what he did well and sought to avoid what he didn't do well. This illustrates a fundamental presupposition that our gifts and call are congruent. That is, God has given each of us the gifts and talents that are consistent with what He created us individually to do. It is our responsibility to search out our calling and destiny, which is the process of clarifying our vision. John was a master at searching out his calling and destiny.

Once our vision is clarified, it's time to execute. Adroit execution starts with an honest assessment of our current condition and a clear vision as to where we want to go. Then a plan is mapped out to transition from where we are to where we want to go. John was a master executor. He didn't act until he had clear vision, but when he had that vision, he moved decisively and without fear. Moving without fear is challenging for all

of us. We fear failure, loss, rejection, pain, etc. Fear can be paralyzing killing any attempts to execute vision in our lives. An ACE never lets fear get in the way. An ACE clearly sees the vision and skillful develops a plan of action and executes it fearlessly regardless of the pain of the process. Coach Landry once stated that setting a goal is not the main thing. It is deciding how you will go about achieving it and staying with the pain.

In the movie Patriot, Mel Gibson plays a South Carolina pacifist named Benjamin Martin who lost his wife, two sons, and a daughter-in-law. His wife was lost before the War of Independence, and the British killed the others during the war. Having witnessed the death of one of his young sons by the cruel hand of British Colonel Tavington, Ben Martin quickly turned from being a pacifist to a patriot. He acquired a vision. Through out the movie, Ben clarified and executed moving ever closer to the vision of independence. In the final battle of the movie, his archenemy, Colonel Tavington, and Ben squared off for an individual contest in the midst of battle. Ben came into the engagement battle weary from fighting and heavyhearted from the loss of his two sons to the tyrannical British Colonel. The British Colonel used cruel and inhuman tactics targeting civilians for death as the penalty for helping the rebels. Now in mortal combat seeking to fulfill his vision of killing the Colonel, Ben found himself in a precarious position. The Colonel strikes several blows causing Ben to fall to his knees. Exhausted and drained, Ben waits for the deathblow when he suddenly sees the colonial battle flag. The visual image stirred his heart as he remembered that the battle was not about his exhaustion, but about securing freedom for his remaining family and friends from the tyranny of the British Crown. Refocused, he mustered strength to rejoin the battle and gained victory over the despotic British Colonel.

Ben Martin was an ACE. He acquired vision. The vision was clarified by the death of two sons and a daughter-in-law. He knew that his family could not survive under the cruel tyranny of the British; hence, he fought for independence. His planning and implementation were skillful, but he encountered many obstacles. Recruiting and training local militia was arduous. The British were better equipped and trained. They also surprised Ben with some of their tactics. The death of Ben's oldest son proved to be nearly too much. But when he found the colonial battle flag among his son's belongings, this symbol of freedom from tyranny stirred his heart and refocused his resolve. The

weariness and discouragement of life no longer gripped his heart, rather the vision of freedom and liberty for his family was again in focus.

All of us need symbols to refocus us when the obstacles of life discourage and distract us. Symbols can be visual, auditory and/or aromatic. If you are a Christian, the cross and the Lord's Supper are powerful symbols of the Christian faith. Also, great hymns like *Amazing Grace* stir our hearts. Citizens of the United States are moved by the pledge of allegiance, the flag, and the national anthem. Organizations frequently have flags, tag lines, logos, company songs, and company smells (i.e., Mrs. Field's cookies) to stir vision and focus. When GE's customers complained about the tube quality of the CT scan machines, GE, as part of the strategy for improved quality, posted signs all over the manufacturing facility with the slogan "Tubes – The Heart of the System"³. Symbols can be anything that reminds us of our vision. It can be our mission statement on the wall in our office. A picture of the product that you are developing, a company song, a scent, or a piece of art. Anything that enables us to overcome our frailties and press through the battle to victory.

Our specific vision is probably tied to our specific calling; hence, the symbols that stir and re-focus each us will be different. When hope was lost, Benjamin Martin was re-energized by the sight of the battle flag. My wife, who teaches children to read, is moved to tears at the sight of statues of children reading. I am moved when I see people change and grow.

Are you an ACE. Have you Acquired vision. Have you Clarified and focused your vision? Are you Executing skillfully? Do you have a symbol to help you play through the pains of life? James Ryle once wrote, "There is talk these days of vision. But vision is much more than a good idea that stirs the soul to temporary endeavors. Vision is the ability to see it, the faith to believe it, the courage to do it, and the hope to endure until it happens. Take any of these components away and vision fails. Each is vital, and indispensable."⁴

The Bible gives us a wonderful vision: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured

³ *Jack – Straight from the Gut by Jack Welch*, Warner Books, 2001, page 209.

⁴ *Epiphanes*, August 6, 2003

such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”⁵ Living out the reality of this vision should be the heart of every Christian. It was the heart of John Wanamaker. In addition to turning vision into reality in his retail business, he acquired great vision in working for the cause of Christ. He assisted the YMCA, helped to start 6 churches, sponsored evangelistic crusades, and served for years as Sunday school superintendent. John Wanamaker was such an ACE in all of life that on his death in 1922, the flags were lowered, schools were closed, the newspaper called him the city’s most eminent citizen, and his pallbearers included the governor of Pennsylvania, mayors of New York and Philadelphia, the chief justice of the supreme court, and Thomas Edison. Without a doubt, if we live with this clarity of vision as John Wanamaker, we will be ACEs in life too.

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⁵ Hebrews 12:2 -3 (NIV)