

“Renewable Energy for Sustainability Practitioners”

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Summary

This talk is inspired by the final stage of the well-known “**Hero’s Journey**” metaphor. Once the hero has completed his or her trials and adventures, the challenge is to manifest the the vision of possibility they bring from the “extraordinary world” in the “real world” of their community and society —or to be a “**Master of Two Worlds.**”

We’ll apply the Master of Two Worlds metaphor to change agents using the **Natural Step Framework**, who carry with them a vision of **sustainability (e.g., social and environmental equity, the triple bottom line, etc.)**. They have had a glimpse of “**Ecotopia**” and labor daily to foster this vision in their organizations and communities.

Along the way, we will look at how the Master of Two Worlds metaphor corresponds with the concept of “**backcasting**” in the Natural Step framework; compatible leadership models (e.g., Heifetz’s **Leadership without easy answers**); and research on **motivation, positive psychology** and the causes and prevention of **burnout**.

We’ll look at psychological benefits of balancing the extraordinary and ordinary worlds:

- **Synergy rather than conflict** between the vision and the circumstances of the real world. After all, the ordinary world is where the mission and objectives live, along with our bodies, families, coworkers, customers and the planet.
- **Approach vs. Avoidance:** Visionary thinking activates our behavioral approach system and generates pleasurable emotional states that lead us to approach real world challenges versus avoiding them.
- **Broaden & Build:** The model promotes positive emotions leading to widened attention, creativity, and mindfulness, and builds social connection, health & resiliency.

We’ll look at potential pitfalls change agents may face:

Leaning too far into the “**extraordinary world**” or vision can be associated with:

- **Reductionism:** Narrowly viewing complex systems or situations through the lens of the vision and missing key details or constituents (e.g., focusing on an abstract vision of sustainability that misses key sociocultural or organizational factors).

- **Lack of Insight:** Confusion of the vision with personality needs & dynamics (e.g., pride, attachment, and the needs for acceptance, esteem or achievement) leading to loss of objectivity and vulnerability to personal “failure.”

Conversely, change agents can become mired in the status quo and inertia of the “real world” associated with:

- **Burnout:** Feeling exhausted, ineffectual, and jaded—often from over-commitment, not maintaining one’s personal health or relationships, or lacking a perspective on the “long view” of one’s work
- **Disillusionment:** A lack of inspiration and meaning—often caused by the absence of a truly compelling and life transcendent vision. (See Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech for one of the most well known examples of a modern, life transcendent vision.)

Finally, we’ll talk about **what to do**. I’ll share a **model** inspired by the system conditions of the Natural Step that describes conditions suitable for long-term motivation and “Renewable energy” for sustainability practitioners:

- **Pluralism:** Working across visions
- **Insight:** Awareness of personal and cultural psychology
- **Resilience:** Maintaining personal and organizational health
- **(Re)visioning:** Cultivating a life transcendent vision

You’ll be led through a **personal reflection** and **small group exchange** to help engage you in the material and encode it for future reference. We’ll end with a **large group dialog**.

I know I will have raised some thoughts and feelings, so I look forward to discuss how we can apply this work at your organization or business.

Keep up your good work,

Thomas Joseph Doherty

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