

Creating Clarity of Direction

Introduction

From the moment we all got up this morning, we have been making decisions. But how many of those decisions were made as a conscious effort to create a particular quality of life? To what extent, had we involved our 'nearest and dearest'? How effectively had we used the resources that were available to us? How many of those decisions led towards a sustainable future?

Creating a signpost

It's difficult to challenge whether the decisions we make are really creating the quality of life we want, if we do not know where we want to be headed. Unless we paint a clear signpost, how are we to know that we are walking down the right road?

Deciding who's and what's involved?

Before we decide in what direction we want to head, we need to decide where we are right now. This involves answering the following questions:

- Who is involved in our day-to-day life that has an impact on our decisions?
- What social, economic and physical resources can I call upon to create the quality of life that we want?

For example, the decision-makers at Semilla Besada comprise Aspen and David. Their son, Samuel, is nearly seventeen and is involved in policy decisions that affect his future. They also consider their neighbours, the local authority and the national parks authority as people they need to keep in the decision-making loop.

When we have decided who the decision-makers are, together we determine what social, economic and physical resources are available to support us in our lives.

For example, those at Semilla Besada created the following list of resources:

- *Social: friends, family, neighbours, local farmers, local co-operative, local businesses*
- *Economic: savings, income from activities at Semilla Besada fundraising, assets that can be sold*
- *Physical: water, farmland, house, land rover, farm equipment, farm buildings, local businesses, library, university, transport network*

Start painting the signpost

Once we have defined these aspects, we can then start painting that signpost! All the decision-makers are included to ensure that everyone who has an impact on our lives is pulling in the same direction.

We start by answering the question "How do we want to feel in our lives?". So often the things we want are simply symptoms of how we want to feel: having our own home may make us feel secure; enjoying an annual holiday may make us feel relaxed; having our own transport may make us feel free. We address this question from the social, economic and environmental perspective and create a statement that exemplifies this. As our lives are always evolving, so too will this statement.

Quality of life

For example, at Semilla Besada, the family drafted the following quality of life statement:

We are inspired by the creative process of moving towards a life that is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable. We are passionate about our work in helping people to view their lives in an holistic context. We are supported by the connection we make with our world-wide community and our natural environment. We are guided by our desire to make a positive difference in our relationship with our fellows and the planet we live on. We are rewarded and sustained by living a wholesome life rooted in meaningful values.

This statement contains the feelings of inspiration, passion, support and reward. It is written in the present tense, because it is in the present that the future is created. It acts as an inspiration and a compass bearing for the quality of life we want to create.

How to obtain this quality of life

Once this statement is created it needs to be put into action, otherwise it will remain an unfulfilled dream. However, this is not the place for specific details of *how* that is going to be effected. It is a statement of *what* needs to be done. This ensures that we do not block any unforeseen opportunities.

For example, Semilla Besada created the following fulfillment statement:

In order to move towards the quality of life we want we are committed to acting in the following ways:

- *making decisions that simultaneously consider social, economic and environmental factors and the quality of life we want,*
- *sustaining ourselves socially through fostering good relationships with both our local and international community,*
- *continuing to expand our knowledge in order to meet the land management challenges we face in a more effective way,*
- *creating opportunities for others to learn about, and experience the value of improving their quality of life whilst simultaneously safeguarding social, economic and environmental resources,*
- *sustaining ourselves physically through effective and sustainable management of the land, and*
- *sustaining ourselves economically through creating a quality product, fostering a commercial network and establishing a vibrant market.*

Short-term gains

We can all probably create short-term gains in quality of life without too much difficulty. However, these gains are often at the expense of long-term sustainability. So the third element of creating clarity of direction is drafting a sustainability statement. What does the future need to look like in order to create the quality of life that we want?

For example, at Semilla Besada, the following sustainability statement was created:

In order for the quality of life we want to be sustainable, the future needs to have a social fabric based on the honouring of diversity, the creation of stable communities and the development of a broader vision, within which we are known for the quality of our work and the integrity of our natures: a natural environment in which there is healthy, abundant and diverse life where resources are respectfully and sustainably managed: an economic climate which supports our needs, but not our greed, and challenges exploitation and waste.

The beginning of the rest of our lives

Creating a statement that outlines the quality of life we want, enables us to create it and ensures that it can be sustained is the beginning of a process. It provides the springboard for gauging and assessing all the decisions we make. It is the beginning of an holistic decision making process which will last the rest of our lives. Through this process, we can work towards creating real quality of life whilst safeguarding the natural resources upon which that life depends.