YOU ARE HERE

By Cheryl Scanlan

You can't get to where you need to go until you know where you currently are. Have you ever used a map at a shopping center that has the "you are here" marker? You need to orient yourself to be able to make decisions about your next steps. As leaders, we tend to think of directional steps from a linear position; a spot on a path, going from where we were to where we want to go. However, if we shift our focus from linear to 360 degrees, we discover that orientation, rather than direction, can be one of the most powerful tools a leader has.

It takes time to assess where you are from a 360 view.  It's understandable why leaders would want to bypass this process, but the long-term cost could be substantial. You may miss critical data that informs you of best next steps to achieve longer term objectives, causing retracing, repeat performances or evenworse, unnecessary regret. In this article, we will explore how to decipher your current location, which can help you get to your next destination by developing within ambiguity, partnering with the Divine dimension, and moving forward with conviction.

**1. Develop within Ambiguity**

My husband, Tom and I recently had a conversation with a couple trying to make a decision about where to live. The pressing decision was motivated by two master's program opportunities. One was local, the other was a significant move for their family. In the short term, the husband's current position at work was ideal and he was being groomed for more. However, their current childcare was not a good situation. If they were to move, he would have no job, but would be in the location where they want to raise a family. He was stuck in questioning "which is the forward-moving direction for me and my family?" He couldn't answer that question until he discovered his underlying values and aligned his decision from there. He was exceptionally loyal and wants to remain loyal to the people who helped him get to where he is now. He was also a protector of family. Like many of us, he likes to know what happens next. Staying meant that he knew exactly what to expect; leaving meant he would have no idea what the short-term might look like. In the end, they had to look at their long-term plan and weigh the decision based on that and their values. There was no wrong decision - there was simply a best decision for him and his family.

I find that everyone is in this place at some point, and without understanding where you are from multiple fronts, it's going to be difficult to make your best decision. Everyone else's "right decision" for you will sound palatable and possible, but isn't necessarily the best for you. Consider the "you are here" analogy. When making a decision, we so often try to identify where we are on a linear path, assuming that there will be one right decision that is forward-moving. But what if "forward" is actually left, right, or diagonal? What if "best" is more of a pivot than a leap? It is paramount that we broaden our horizon to include multiple "right" decisions. We must add another dimension by considering decisions from their multi-faceted impact, rather than tunneling our vision, which tunnels results.

Declan Fitzsimmons of the [Harvard Business Review](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001QlG7WGVrah4IWMusDmTy3igzxJQBxtdDnZNs7SEIDwmtbtEvlSRaV0veYRiLWd-r_rIvS2rZNltP_8SfiUlKCN__cgUybijEOb9Azn713GTNJnME7s4TWw3pEGCfLEQ3j4Teugo5t2_s8F-OsgThCpPkZmoPixQG2-wgeRPQ8DxIuUJTkiU4_LoheniHV2P6x6jSU5XR5zCTsCNHLORob27UuJESPddyCv_Mk7qKJN8LyOJ3SdtDe9EvDxunRrrulrsCx42h7oQ=&c=iUvKQ3b0QAhR5l7gmxbjL-cxhcy5hJDpM6XyDxSeZ-YPUkZqGzxpDg==&ch=sYPms8PV0vARRdsVXGTpN4cpGBjNoL1jI-sUb5NmWlOHHjbrykeMfg==) explores this principle through the insight of William Shakespeare. One of his Yale professors commented of the author that he introduced characters who developed, rather than simply unfolded:

"If a character merely unfolds, we intuit correctly that we already know all there is to know about them when they first appear onstage. Their authors have robbed them of the one quality that would make them interesting: the capacity for self-enquiry that might reveal something unexpected not only to us but also to themselves. They teach us little because they cannot surprise us, essentially because they cannot surprise themselves. This is the real-world equivalent of the manager who comes out of a feedback session and thinks, 'Nothing new - the same feedback as I have heard before,' and then says to themselves, 'I guess I am what I am!' or 'I have my way of doing things, and some people like it and some people don't.' Shakespeare does not let us off the hook so easily. He shows us that we are not simply who we say we are, but instead are made up of many conflicting and unknown parts.'

Fitzsimmons goes on to remark that, "change is rather about moving toward, rather than away from, the anxieties that powerful external challenges provoke in our internal worlds." It may have been a while since you last read *Hamlet* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but we all know that climactic moment in which our heroine discovers who they will be, often contrary to who they once were. We all have the opportunity to create these pivotal moments in our own lives, if we choose bravery in seizing the (often uncomfortable) opportunities.

***In what area could you choose to develop rather than unfold?***

**2. Partner with the Divine Dimension**

There was another couple Tom and I recently met with and they were talking in circles about a decision they had to make. After we talked through it for a while, we struggled to identify a solution. I stopped the conversation and said, "we're going to pray and listen to God for a moment." We closed our eyes, stayed quiet for a few minutes, and started praying. When we were done praying, he said he was still in the same place, but after that moment, the conversation took a significant shift. They started planning their next step. It wasn't until I pointed out what happened later in the conversation that he realized God had indeed guided and directed. It was a worshipful moment that moved him to tears. He was given the gift of seeing that God was indeed with him!

If we want to expand our possibilities from one-dimensional (linear) to three-dimensional (360), we must invite God into the orientation process for our decisions. We can only see from the finite, but the Divine dimension can bring a depth and height of perspective that is un-tapped by any other process. What could happen if you invite God to expand your perspective? What next steps might move you to the realm of possibility if you stop and listen with people who love you, yet will be quiet and just listen with you? Any friend will give an opinion of what they think you should do - wise friends will support you as you discover that for yourself.

We recently had a snowfall in North Carolina. It didn't last long, but for a moment, the world grew quiet. You could hear nature breathe and animals speak at volumes that are usually muted by the daily din. There's something about stillness that opens you up to hear things you couldn't hear before. Life's busy decibels often have the same impact on our personal, relational, and professional awareness. We crank up so much productivity that the sounds of other options, especially those off the beaten path, get drowned out. It's possible those unmarked or ignored paths help lead us to discover unfound potential and sought-after breakthrough. They lead to summit heights that can't be found on the main highways of life. However, we don't get there by passively slipping into the steam of one-dimensional thinking. Those paths don't go from A to B; they twist and turn and climb upwards, requiring intentional agility and observation.

Awareness of the path you're on and the resources at hand is paramount in orienting yourself to what lies ahead. It engages you in the realities and options that surround you. This kind of holistic awareness takes time to develop.  Researchers recently [conducted a study](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001QlG7WGVrah4IWMusDmTy3igzxJQBxtdDnZNs7SEIDwmtbtEvlSRaV0veYRiLWd-rdK-wgczQQWHtqf94o4I6btthTYe3uiaOEof3BolPeMuSH1LUgQ1sRpwDJ107zy9W8wG_i_dniwLwDUbFsNTZQrE4JaTGmvyOMiXD56N3l3oNE7M1Map9irUzGNZGU2lKzQUpJqI4IURWtD6v9U_duL-1dJ6bG15DYwTuCOYjmNJ0hVHZqIi90w==&c=iUvKQ3b0QAhR5l7gmxbjL-cxhcy5hJDpM6XyDxSeZ-YPUkZqGzxpDg==&ch=sYPms8PV0vARRdsVXGTpN4cpGBjNoL1jI-sUb5NmWlOHHjbrykeMfg==) of 10 investigations and 5,000 participants to uncover that:

"We know surprisingly little about this critical skill... We've found that even though most people believe they are self-aware, self-awareness is a truly rare quality: We estimate that only 10%-15% of the people we studied actually fit the criteria... Self-awareness isn't one truth. It's a delicate balance of two distinct, even competing, viewpoints."

The process of aligning ourselves with our highest and best potential isn't just about asking questions; it's about asking the right questions. Consider the very first question ever asked. In Genesis 3:9, God asks Adam "where are you?" Notice that God was the one who asked where Adam was. God clearly knew, but he wanted Adam to be aware of where he was. As we start a new year, I wonder if God might invite us to observe where we are? We have been given an invitation to orient ourselves to the fullness of our lives and then let the great Revealer show us where He wants us to be. Often, asking where we are ends up leading us to consider who we are, and that is at the core of growth. It was when Adam considered the orientation of his life that he was forced to see the orientation of his heart; his inner being. Out of your being flows your doing. Until you take stock of who you are and who you want to be, you will keep circling back to the "you are here" on the map, having to re-orient yourself over and over.

In order to truly orient yourself to reality, you have to lead your thoughts down paths of discovery and not just naval-gazing. Yet, the discovery is only half of the battle. Many have the curiosity to discover, but few have the tenacity to dare, to embark,orto act upon what they have discovered.

***What is one decision you have to make where you could try including the Divine dimension?***

**3. Move with Conviction**

I had a client I was hoping to work with, but things didn't work out. In the initial meetings, he admitted that he had shared things with me that he had never shared with anyone else. He was starting to get a sense of where he really was, but just wasn't ready to tackle it. In other words, he was on a trajectory. He knew the linear path necessary for his vision and needed to follow it, for whatever reason. As I listened, I heard a longing to experience the more. He readily admitted that his identity was linked to how much money was in his bank account. However, he longed to spend more time with his children before they grew up and left home, yet ironically he chose to stay on his same path. What he knew well and had defined him for so long pulled him away from the priorities that were truly important to him.

We all have our "one day" priorities that we eventually want to work on... "One day, I'll get back in the gym," or, "One day I'll read more" and "One day I'll reconnect with my spouse..." but at some point, that "one day" has to shift to "day one." At some point, leaders decide to let priorities flow from values, rather than the other way around. We are not victims to our goals or schedules; we are the leaders of them. You have just as many hours in each day as the people who do the things you wish you did; you just choose to spend yours differently. [Stew Friedman suggests](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001QlG7WGVrah4IWMusDmTy3igzxJQBxtdDnZNs7SEIDwmtbtEvlSRaV0veYRiLWd-rueZltIwkPSl802kStkh4FJXTk7eWdArADRx1z4S-y5XN7r67zJttw5i9o0Jh3bHTXZlsDDUtVvBVdvlwceTUhxPPg7kzZeG5OWfSiLGCvlVx1uiIbCUlUNVTs1BvigDxKwBwMb_KqGDDnS80yJY62HRhLgJ2qgHS_E_n_D8VwvuJ130qypP1Ew==&c=iUvKQ3b0QAhR5l7gmxbjL-cxhcy5hJDpM6XyDxSeZ-YPUkZqGzxpDg==&ch=sYPms8PV0vARRdsVXGTpN4cpGBjNoL1jI-sUb5NmWlOHHjbrykeMfg==) that "zero-sum thinking" traps us into thinking it's either one priority or the other, when there are many open ways of approaching the issue:

"There are many truly successful people in our midst who have achieved greatness not by forsaking their families, communities, and private selves, but, rather, by embracing these parts of their lives. They have found creative ways to reduce conflict and replace it with a sense of harmony between work and the rest of life. Not only does this reduce stress and its discontents, it is the very source of the strength that enables their admirable accomplishments...The good news is that this kind of integration is available not only to those with extraordinary talents and lots of luck, but to anyone interested in investing effort to lead a life in which you stay true to yourself, serve others, and grow as a person. This integration and a laser-like focus on what truly matters most to you is the key to leading a meaningful, less overwhelmed life - the one you want."

Goals, timelines, and trajectories serve critical purposes in the business world. Nevertheless, if you don't make your goals serve you, you will eventually serve them. Remember that your vision for your future is only a vision - we all know that vision develops with age. What could you give yourself permission to see for your life that may not have been in your original vision? We so often begin our path with ourselves in mind, but we have the opportunity to finish invested in much more.

***Where could you give yourself permission to adjust your course in how you view your future?***

Like our young friends, you can make the best decision for yourself and the ones you influence and love and not necessarily the right decision around one piece of who you are. It takes courage to look at where you are from a multi-dimensional, 360 view, but what might change in your response to your approach?  When Adam considered his response to God calling "where are you?", he knew he needed a covering for himself. That was the "right decision," in a small sense. But the best decision would have been to run to God and allow God to cover him.

I recently read [an article](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001QlG7WGVrah4IWMusDmTy3igzxJQBxtdDnZNs7SEIDwmtbtEvlSRaV0veYRiLWd-r6amQ8ERYIMKzOl0lE9gGmKsAf5o4ySiJ44tBP89gnvp-MUPqhYEvjtblbypFxXcfa8ZtOsPQob2Xw6ke3JrH4LgVwIShFF_vMG8QPhZYSZFS4ugQkwM-78__znuCs4eeZdNC4XQmvCCQGNhb9QO5TK6GCTMKexzU6hKdJOZgKdI=&c=iUvKQ3b0QAhR5l7gmxbjL-cxhcy5hJDpM6XyDxSeZ-YPUkZqGzxpDg==&ch=sYPms8PV0vARRdsVXGTpN4cpGBjNoL1jI-sUb5NmWlOHHjbrykeMfg==) about how a step "sideways or backwards sometimes turns into a slingshot." I wonder how many "right decisions" could be within our sphere of options if we removed the constraints of our current trajectory? Throw out the lie that a change of plans amounts to failure. Let go of the idea that what you originally aimed for must forever remain your target. What growth might occur with an intentional side step, or even a step back?

As we start the new year, would you be willing to jump off your linear trajectory for just a little while and allow yourself to see not just what you are about, but who you are choosing to be in the process? Who are you? What is important to you? Don't forget to bring in the Divine dimension. It's a game changer.

**About Cheryl Scanlan**

Cheryl Scanlan, MCC, CMCC, BCC is president of C3Advantage. She has worked with CEOs that are in Fortune 100 through next generation small business owners. Having also run a multi-million dollar firm in New York, Cheryl knows the importance of business goals and the impact of teams. Cheryl's thought partnering method helps leaders see clearly what is fuzzy, articulate what is currently unintelligible, and generate coherent & executable strategy.