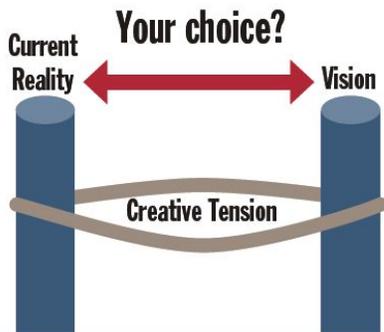


Holding Creative Tension

from The Fifth Discipline by Peter M. Senge

People often have great difficulty talking about their visions, even when the visions are clear. Why? Because we are acutely aware of the gaps between our vision and reality. These gaps can make a vision seem unrealistic or fanciful. They can discourage us or make us feel hopeless. But the gap between vision and current reality is also a source of energy. If there were no gap, there would be no need for any action to move toward the vision. Indeed, the gap is *the* source of creative energy. We call this gap *creative tension*.

Imagine a rubber band, stretched between your vision and current reality. When stretched, the rubber band creates tension, representing the tension between vision and current reality. What does tension seek? Resolution or release. There are only two possible ways for the tension to resolve itself: pull reality toward the vision – or pull the vision toward reality. Which occurs depends on whether we hold steady to the vision.



Creative tension doesn't feel any particular way. It is the force that comes to play at the moment when we acknowledge a vision is at odds with current reality.

Still, creative tension often leads to feelings or emotions associated with anxiety, such as sadness, discouragement, hopelessness, or worry. This happens so often that people easily confuse these emotions with creative tension. People come to think that the creative

tension process is all about being in a state of anxiety. But it is important to realize that these "negative" emotions that may arise when there is creative tension are not creative tension itself. These emotions are what we call emotional tension.

If we fail to distinguish emotional tension from creative tension, we predispose ourselves to lowering our vision. If we feel deeply discouraged about a vision that is not happening, we may have a strong urge to lighten the load of that discouragement. There is one immediate remedy: lower the vision! Emotional tension can always be relieved by adjusting the one pole of the creative tension that is completely under our control at all times – the vision. The feelings that we dislike go away because the creative tension that was their source is reduced. Our goals are now much closer to our current reality. *Escaping emotional tension is easy – the only price we pay is abandoning what we truly want, our vision.*