

# HEAVEN & HELL

This exercise was inspired by my friend and fellow Vistage International Chair John Younker, who developed years ago an exercise he calls "A Walk on the Beach." Recommendation: Before you conduct this exercise with your team, complete it for yourself.

## Heaven

Year \_\_\_\_\_

## Hell

1. Assemble your team of leaders.
2. Give each leader a blank piece of paper; ask them to draw a horizontal line to create a timeline. On the line, list years from past to present. Make the first year on the timeline the founding of the organization (on the left-hand side of the line) and list the current year on the right-hand side of the line.
3. Ask each leader to think about pivotal milestones in the life of the organization (including their career at the firm) that were joyful, fulfilling and overwhelmingly positive. Mark those events above the line on the "Heaven" side.
4. Ask your leaders to think about times in the life of the organization (including their career at the firm) that were painful, disastrous and overwhelmingly negative. Mark those events below the line on the "Hell" side. Everything each person has listed – above the line and below the line – is a character-building event in the life of your organization. For the events noted in "Heaven," ask each person to write their response to this question: *"What values were present that caused me to be fulfilled?"* Likewise, for the events noted in "Hell," ask person to write their response to this question: *"What values were absent that caused me to be unfulfilled?"*
5. Ask each person to write a single word for each of the events and the feelings they conjure up.
6. Ask each person to share their words. As the leader, start with your list of words. Write your words on a flip chart.
7. Ask for volunteers to read their words – listing all of the words on the flip chart – until all of the leaders have declared their words.
8. Group similar words together. Discard phrases because people can remember words but they can't remember phrases. Discuss the words on the flip chart.
9. Delete any words that you and your leaders cannot all agree reflect the character of your organization until you're left with a handful of words.
10. Ask your leaders to repeat this exercise with their direct reports. The words that emerge from this process are the words that resonate most fully with you, your top leaders and their direct reports. These are the words that codify your organization's character. If you think that exercise was difficult, get ready to start walking your talk.

**GREG BUSTIN • BUSTIN.COM**

Strategic Planning • Keynote Speeches • Private Workshops  
Contact Greg at 214.720.3707 or [greg.bustin@bustin.com](mailto:greg.bustin@bustin.com)

connect:

