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America has always been viewed as the "land of opportunity." America has become a place where equality is no longer just a dream or a goal, but a reality. This would not be true were it not for the ability of past and present Americans to become visionaries and look to the future. Vision is the most crucial civic value. Without it, you cannot truly be an American.

Throughout history, it has been necessary for the good of the nation to lay aside the wants of now and think of what will benefit future generations. A perfect example of this is the creation of the Constitution.

When it was decided that the Articles of Confederation were no longer an effective method of governing, the Founding Fathers were sent to Philadelphia to revise them. But they had a vision, and they knew for it to become a reality they had to scrap the Articles and start over. This they did, regardless of the fact that all of America was angry at their actions. They thought little about themselves and their own reputations, but concentrated solely on the creation of a document that would allow America to grow into the nation they knew it could be. Their way was filled with uncertainty. None knew whether they would succeed or if they would see the benefits themselves, but because of their vision, the Constitution was written. It reflects the beauty of the American dream and allows the vision of each individual American to have an effect on the continuation and development of our country.

The vision of one such citizen has changed many lives. Dr. Anne Carlson, known affectionately as simply Dr. Anne, was born on November 4, 1915 without arms or legs, but she never let that get in her way. She lived by the words of her father, "Two arms and two legs missing are not as important as one head present." She went on to get a Ph.D. in Education from the University of Minnesota. Dr. Anne was determined to use her disability to prove to other disabled children that all you need is a vision and the guts to go out and achieve it. She taught for years at the Crippled Children's School in Jamestown, North Dakota, where she was an inspiration to all, staff and students alike. She later became the principal, and finally in 1950 the administrator. In 1980, the school was renamed the Anne Carlson Center for Children. She brightened the lives of all around her, and gave disabled children everywhere a role model of success. Dr. Anne had a vision, and because of it, the Anne Carlson Center is one of the most successful schools for disabled children in the nation. She never let a little thing like a lack of arms and legs keep her from realizing that dream. I was honored to have met this woman, and the hours I spent volunteering at the Anne Carlson Center were some of the best and most rewarding of my life.

In comparison with the visions I've already discussed and their impact on the country, I have a modest vision, but it is one that I hope will continue to grow in power and strength as the years pass. I have discovered that all of the people who have had the largest impact on me and have shaped my life the most are my teachers. My high school speech and theater instructors have expanded upon my inherent love of theater, and have given me the confidence to continue on that path. They have given me my vision. I plan to stay in North Dakota and cultivate an enjoyment of the arts in rural areas as a high school teacher. I might get more personal satisfaction out of a professional acting career, but if I can give this gift of knowledge and love to another young person, I will have done something for the future of America. As I give joy and guidance to one person, that joy will continue to be passed on to future generations. My vision is that because of me, someone's life will be better.

There are several civic values that many people believe are the most important to being an American, but without the vision that gives those values purpose, you have nothing. As Joel Barker put it, "Vision without action is a dream. Action without vision is simply passing the time. Action with vision is making a positive difference."