

ESSAY SIX

## Leadership: Where Does Atlanta Go From Here?

**Harry West**

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In the good times and during the bad times, leadership is one of the most enduring and universal responsibilities. (Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. 1995. *World Class Leaders: The Power of Partnering*. New York: Simon & Schuster.) From what place in the human capacity does the ability to lead emerge? From vision, from passion, from a deep love of and hope for humankind? What can we learn from these Olympic Games about ourselves and the role of leadership in helping to answer the question, "Where does Atlanta go from here?"

Management consultant Joel Barker talks about leadership in paradigm shifts as he describes how much easier it is to lead when there is a crisis, but how much harder it is to effect positive change on a proactive basis—when only the true visionary can see that there is critical work to be done. In other words, getting ahead of the curve without a concrete catalyst is tricky.

Our region's energies have been focused on one main event for six years. There were deadlines and a sense of ur-

gency. Many positives have emerged from this experience—both tangible and intangible. But, keeping the momentum going after the games are over will really test our inner resolve and leadership abilities.

Our regional community has already begun to take action steps for the future. An excellent example is Operation Legacy, a collaborative and proactive economic development effort between public and private entities in the Atlanta Region. Operation Legacy used the opportunity of the Olympics to attract a select group of the world's leading investors and corporations to the Atlanta Region to personally witness what we have to offer. Perhaps most important though, Operation Legacy represents the kind of regional collaboration between diverse partners that will continue to be critical.

Over the past five years through a project called VISION 2020, regional citizens have created a virtual road map for how to successfully negotiate the twists and turns that lie ahead. (See Harry West, "Vision 2020: Key to Regionalism in the Atlanta Region," *The Regionalist*: Vol. 1 No. 3, Fall 1995). First, thousands of regional citizens participated in VISION 2020 to create a shared vision for our region's successful long-term develop-

ment. Then, hundreds of regional stakeholders worked for more than a year to determine action steps to address the top 10 critical issues facing our region. The end result is a mandate for community renewal, spelled out through 41 specific initiatives relating to everything from education to public safety.

No other metropolitan area in the country has completed such an exhaustive effort to anticipate change and then create action steps to achieve success in the future. VISION 2020 has revealed the passion, dedication, and determination of this region's citizens. Efforts like this must continue if we are to know where our ship is to sail.

These are good beginnings that hold great promise. But, now that the party is over and the glitter of the Olympics is a special memory, we must get to work and tackle the really difficult challenges facing our region right now. ■

***Harry West** has served the Atlanta Region for 35 years in local government leadership positions and as director of the Atlanta Regional Commission since 1973. Throughout his career, he has held the belief that vision and leadership are what set apart great communities from good communities. Through efforts like VISION 2020 and the Regional Leadership Institute, he works to contribute to the Atlanta Region's continued success.*