

The Intentional Tourist  
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“Most people overestimate what they can achieve in a year and underestimate what they can achieve in ten years.” Often attributed to Bill Gates, it’s a compelling way to think about community development and reveals why patience and persistence are more profitable and sustainable than relying on passion.

I first heard “Gates Law” from Nebraska Community Foundation CEO Jeff Yost during a Peer Learning session we hosted in Red Cloud. During this event, we hosted leaders from across the state of Nebraska interested in “energizing entrepreneurial ecosystems.” We showed them our construction projects and let them talk to a few small business owners here and in Lebanon, KS. During the last 3 years, all of us have been learning about what works for community and small business development in rural Nebraska and Kansas and taking those ideas home.

What all of our communities share in common is the ability to craft a clear vision for the future and then create plans to execute those ideas. While an initial project idea and its end results are often exciting, the process of getting there is mostly tedious. What we’re seeing happen right now in Red Cloud is the result of 10-20 years of planning, meetings, fundraising asks, and laborious grant applications. Grant announcements make it seem like we’ve just won some big prize, but the secret sauce here is hard work—we don’t wait around to win the lottery, we figure out a way to make things work. It’s a lot of learning how to play the game instead of complaining about the rules.

Think back to 10 years ago and how different main street felt and how doomed it all seemed. Now, a renewal of the downtown commercial district is occurring. In 1999, the Opera House was still mostly a dream. Now, in 2024 we’re months away from a 28 room hotel, a Central Community College Learning Center, and the storefronts that people actually want to do business in are mostly full or developing. We have a mini-business district blooming on the north end of town. And let’s not forget about the National Willa Cather Center and The Valley Child Development Center.

Because of our planning, we’ve pulled in \$822K in grants since attaining our Creative District designation in 2022. That’s \$200K for the Hotel Garber, \$562K for Hardwick Park, and \$60K for administrative and marketing costs. None of that would have happened if we hadn’t included those ideas in our strategic plan and there would not have been anyone to apply for it if the City, Chamber, Community Foundation, and WCF hadn’t launched the Heritage Tourism collaborative in 2015.

Is there a change that you want to see? What’s your 5 year plan? For yourself? For your workplace or organization? What about Red Cloud? Write it down. Share it with others. Build a team. Build momentum. Get started now and don’t give up when it gets boring. You’ll be amazed by how much you can achieve in 10 years if you stick with it.