

Purveyors of Hope: The role of the Leader

By Douglas Crawford PhD

Hope was the four-letter word most uttered by the candidates during the past presidential primaries. Leaders are in the position where they can offer hope to the hopeless. Napoleon is attributed to defining leaders as “ the purveyors of hope.” Yet, I fear that sometimes leaders do not grasp what is required to turn a promising phrase into being one who supplies or provides hope to his or her constituency. To be an effective leader, one needs to understand the actions required in order to fulfill the promise.

Research by C. R. Snyder (2000) gives us greater insights into how a leader can provide hope. For hope to occur, the leader must satisfy three components. First, the leader must set the direction with a challenging vision. Do the people in your organization know what they are ultimately trying to accomplish? If you walked into a department meeting today, what kind of responses would you get from your team?

Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, was renowned for quizzing his executives on the spot regarding their respective operations and the direction they were taking the business. A leader must be able to articulate a clear vision that is constantly being affirmed throughout the organization.

Second, the leader must assure that people have the skills and capabilities to achieve the vision. As a leader, do you know what it takes for people to succeed in your organization? How are you addressing any shortcomings? Imagine the frustration workers experience when told of a great vision, yet they don't have the tools to accomplish it. Building efficacy among your workforce is essential to building hope.

Third, the leader must show the path the team members must follow to achieve the vision. This is an area where many leaders fail by painting a rosy future state, assuring there is a skilled workforce yet failing in the execution. Providing a vision is not enough. People also need a roadmap on how they are going to reach this vision. Often this roadmap is achieved through individual and team objectives that align with the vision.

Reflect for a minute on the politicians that espouse hope. Does their vision have a pathway that demonstrates that if certain steps are followed then the vision will be realized? Does your team hesitate to take action? Have you set clear and practical expectations that guide them toward your vision?

Leaders can transform peoples' lives by providing hope. The rhetoric in this election year demonstrates how coveted hope can be. People losing hope begin to spiral downward into disillusionment, despair, and hopelessness. Leaders are purveyors of hope when the critical elements comprised of vision, enabling skills, and a clear path are provided to the organization.

What an impact a leader can make when she or he is a builder of hope.

Snyder, C.R., (2000) *Handbook of hope: Theories, measures and applications*. San Diego: Academic Press.