

**Leading with Hope**

Back in December we looked at leading in crisis. We thought about the unprecedented blizzard of COVID and how we had to guide our organisations up to the summit of change. We considered three key elements at the summit of change:

* Facing the truth
* Letting go
* Receiving hope

Today we are going to look more at the third one and share our experiences about Leading with Hope. Before you break into groups, I’ll just give a few thoughts about what leading with hope means to me. As I have been preparing this, I’ve realised that to lead with hope may be less about leadership insights from theory, or leadership skills or attitudes, but hope connects deeply with our personal faith.

**People need hope**

All human beings are painfully hope-based creatures. Mere survival is not enough. It is an essential element, like oxygen, food or sunshine. We need something to live for.

**Dostoevsky said:**  ‘To live without Hope is to Cease to live’. 

Victor Frankl classic text about ‘Man’s search for meaning’ – those who survived concentration camps were not the strongest or the most determined or the most balanced, but those who clung onto hope.

And on the upside, Martin Luther said: “Everything that has ever been done in the world is born of hope”

**Your key role as a leader is to bring hope to your organisation.**

Our organisations are hope-based. Think about the mission of your agency – it’s about hope.

Our leadership is all about connecting people with the purpose, creating meaning.

Our staff need hope to turn up with their whole selves at work.

Gervaise Bushe wrote: “It is impossible to get people to collectively act to change the future if they don’t have hope”.

**Hope measurably improves performance**

The American Psychology Association highlight John Maltby’s research with University students in the UK (and replicated by Kevin Rand in the US). They found that hope was a better predictor of academic performance than intelligence, personality or even past academic performance. And it is not just for students. A meta study of 45 research projects in the US that looked at 11,000 employees found that hope accounted for 14% of productivity in the workforce. – again more than intelligence.

Your role as leaders is to create an organisational culture of hope.

**So what is hope?**

Start with what it is not. Hope is not false positivity. ‘It will get better soon’. For many being positive all the time has almost become an obsession. We have to find a silver lining. Yung Cho Hun called it ‘the violence of positivity’

Not optimism or wishful thinking. Glass half full.

Hope is different from wishing or optimism in two important ways:

1. because hope is goal-oriented.
2. because it has to do with facing reality.

Optimism is rooted in self or circumstances. Kevin Rand’s study found that while hope was a good predictor of academic performance, optimism was not.

Hope is a motivation to persevere towards a goal, even when we are sceptical that a positive outcome is likely. Hope is a mindset that helps us work towards our goals even when we face significant adversity. It is a motivation to stay in the game.

Hope involves facing reality. accepting or making peace with grief

Weep with those who weep.

Grief is something you surrender to; you do not manage or control

Where I worked in the Mosquito Coast of Honduras, the indigenous word for love, Latwan, also meant pain. To love someone was to have pain for them.

We face grief, not with positivity, but with hope.

Yet not submerged by pain.

Share it, but not take on fears.

Easy to look at the wind and the waves. We are all tempted to focus on the COVID storm at the moment

Jesus in a deep sleep on the boat – does it feel a bit like that at the moment?

Hope is the opposite of fear. It takes courage.

**But where we put our hope matters**

Many people in Europe over the last few decades have put their hope in the relentless progress. Things get better for us and for our children. A gospel of upward mobility. 2020 may have burst that bubble to a degree.

Yet in the UK many are now simply putting their hope in the vaccine, which will return everything to how it was before. COVID just a short-term blip – a temporary interruption

If we think organisationally, we put our hope in the mission and growth of our agency. Or perhaps even our latest strategy. Over the years I have facilitated countless strategic plans. I wonder if this has led to people putting their hope in this new direction or this internal change process.

But when we do not fully achieve those missions, when reality does not conform, we may:

* Lie to ourselves or deny that we are falling short – certainly lots of Annual Reports read like this.
* Excuse ourselves – accept mediocre performance
* Get disillusioned – become cynical or burnt out

Or we may put our hope in our church, our job, our spouse, our children… All flawed humans. Will let us down.

*30 second pause: Where do you really put your hope on a day-to-day basis?*

As Christians we need to fix our eyes, not on the storms in the world, not on COVID rates, or on-going injustices in the world.

Nor put our hope in our organisation’s ability to calm or even survive the storm,

But on Jesus. Hebrews 12 says: “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus…. So that you will not grow weary or lose heart”

**Martin Luther King** ‘We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.’

**Leading with hope**

If we believe that our hope is ultimately based on the gospel message, that ultimately all will be well, then hope is intimately related to our faith.

1 Corinthians 13 – faith, hope and love.  ‘Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly.’ Message translation.

Hope does not emerge from circumstances. John 16 warns “In this world you will have trouble”. We are meant to expect plagues and wars. If we feel disappointed by 2020, perhaps that is simply showing us that we put our hopes in the wrong things.

Our hope with which we lead emerges from faith. It is an expectation of a coming good based on the persona and promises of God. John 16 finishes the sentence “But take heart for I have overcome the world”

Imagine hope like a beautiful flower.

It is rooted in the soil of faith.

But it needs to be resilient, not fragile flower.

Hope is a virtue, not a feeling or an emotion – it needs careful cultivation in the present.

**How do we cultivate hope?**

How do we sing a song of hope in this strange land Psalm 137

1. Reflecting back on what God has done in our lives. Actively remembering. After all hope is how we view the future based on our experience of God in the past.

*Stop for a moment and think about this on your own individually*

1. Hope also demands we look forward. Looking for what God is doing today (even in the midst of difficult times). God does not bring suffering, but God can and does bring good out of it. Joseph – something Satan meant for harm. This attribute is a core part of my experience of God. IF we open any suffering to God, it can become good.

**Group discussion**

* Think about one incident in the past where you experienced God’s presence or power most strongly
* Where do you see God working today in your life, your organisation or the world?
* How do you try to lead others with hope?
* What makes you hopeful? How do you replenish your hope? How do you care for your soul?

**Closing:**

Romans 15

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Chat: Victor Frankl Man’s Search for Meaning