



Leadership and Hope

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Napoleon Bonaparte said, "A leader is a dealer in hope." Now many folks' experience suggests that rather than being dealers in hope, many leaders are better described as dealers in fear. And this holds for self appointed leaders as well as those appointed by others. Rather than creating a vision of something better, they excel in scaring people to support them through instilling and playing on fears. And this does not only refer to the obvious candidates such as Hitler and Stalin. Leaders of organizations who threaten you with job loss if you don't do what they say are leading with fear. Leaders of countries who get you to vote for them by highlighting the horrors that will happen if you don't vote for them are dealing in fear. Religious organizations who threaten damnation if you don't follow them, are dealers in fear.

Now threats and fear can work to a point. I have even heard managers justify their methods by saying it gets people to do what they want them to do. Well, yes it does, because our physiology is hardwired to focus on fear. We are biologically programmed to survive and so anything that could threaten our survival gets lots and lots of attention. In fact if you are really scared you cannot focus on much else. And that is a problem. Focusing on fear gets us to listen, but it focuses us only on what is wrong. We tune out everything else. It makes us scared and defensive. And if you really want to succeed in life, as a person, team, department, institution, organization, or country, you need the solution oriented creativity, problem solving, and decision making skills that are shut down when we are scared. Fear may mean we survive, but it does not mean we thrive. People who are scared are not inspired to make positive changes. They run away from life rather than embracing it and creating the world they want and believe in.

What does Hope mean?

Something I don't usually do is look up the definition of words. However I did come across this great definition of "Hope" through Google. *Hope is "the feeling that what is wanted can be had, or events will turn out for the best."* Hope brings out the best in people. Hope unlocks the natural curiosity, inquisitiveness, and innovation in humans. Hope gets us to develop better things and wanted outcomes. Fear leads to a shutting out of information. Fear creates defensiveness and narrow mindedness. Enough fear can turn even the most generous, kindest, open-minded people into tyrants.



So what can a leader do to create hope?

Leaders in Hope talk Vision and Change. There cannot be hope without a vision, a vision that others support and which therefore is the vision of the followers as well. So you need to have a

vision of something better and you need to tell others about it so that they understand it. If you want to lead with hope, then you want to get a vision. Without a vision you are going nowhere. Without a vision, you get sidetracked into following the visions of others, visions which may be about fear and not about hope. And you don't do any leading; you do defending and following and playing catch up. In order for a vision to be realized there has to be change. So a dealer of hope has to be comfortable with change. A leader has to be able to change and show others how to change accordingly.

How do you get people to follow you if you deal in hope ask those who lead with fear? After all if you scare the people, you just need to promise the solution to their fears and they will follow you. People pay more attention to bad news stories than good news stories as most newspaper editors know. Well, below are some suggestions.

Connect with others: I use this term to incorporate everything meant by communication and more. The need for connection is met when we enter another person's world. There is no substitute for spending time with someone and really listening from the heart. For most people, truly being heard is so close to being loved, they are almost inseparable.



Respect others: The need for respect is met by honoring and regarding people as important. Value their opinion even if you don't agree with it. Respect their person, their dreams, and their challenges. And respect their time, which is something a lot of leaders don't do, acting as if their - the leader's- schedule is the only one that counts.

Encouragement: The need for encouragement is met by urging people to hang in there, to persist toward the goals they so want to achieve. Send notes, phone someone.

Support: Notice when someone is experiencing periods of stress. Use resources, even perhaps your personal resources, to assist them.

Appreciate others: The need (that we all have) for appreciation is met through expressing thanks and praise when someone has accomplished something.

Approval: Build up and affirm a person and acknowledge the importance of the relationship. People are crying out for someone to say, "I am so proud of you, you make things better."

Now every single person is a leader. If you don't lead other people then you certainly lead your own life, or you should. So look at all the leadership roles you play in your life. You may be the leader of a company, a non-profit organization, a religious community, a family, a team. And you will also be the leader of your own life. When it comes to leading others are you a dealer in hope? When it comes to leading your own life, are you a dealer in hope?