

31 Creating Hope

RECENT DISCUSSIONS with a half-dozen experienced HRD consultants yielded this bit of wisdom: We are in the business of creating hope. We arrive in our clients' offices laden with concepts and techniques, models and methods. We display our array of training programs and processes; we offer to look into an organization to help it understand what is really going on. We talk enthusiastically about the great results we achieved down the hall or in another company. We tell the organization what we would like to help it accomplish. And above all this brandishing of wares and wherefores hangs one word: hope. Our clients have dreams they hope to realize, and we feed their hopes with our own hopes.

This is a hope-filled profession aspiring to improve the use of human talent in organizations. It's a hope-filled profession spawned in a post-World War II world when many of us were also spawned. We grew up feeding on the possibilities of that era, and now we feed our idealism through our work. That work is more than a job; and that's probably why you're reading this column right now—and definitely why I'm writing it. We do work that encourages us to be hopeful and to bring that hope to others. Our methodologies may change over time, but our aspirations persist. They are the real reasons we are so invested in management development, or quality, or self-directed teams, or future search, or whatever our latest enlightened discovery may be. All of our wonderful technologies are just vehicles that deliver hope to the people of the organizations we serve. Like Domino's, we also deliver. But we deliver hope, not pizza—and usually it takes more than 30 minutes.

And what could be more filled with hope than learning, our stock in trade? Learning depends on a learner acquiring abilities and hope. Or maybe it's hope before abilities. But either way, hope is a key ingredient. When working with individuals and groups, I try to attend to my internal "hope barometer." Regardless of how well or how poorly a person or group seems to be doing at the moment, I am checking

out their hopefulness about what they are doing. Patterns of hopefulness—and hopelessness—can become self-fulfilling, so paying attention to them is crucial. I can help participants build as much as they hope for.

Let's focus on your own learning: Think about an activity that you engage in often at work or play. It might be quilt-making, training design, fly fishing, group dynamics, painting, gardening, team building, or playing piano. Select one activity that meets eight of these 10 criteria:

- ▶ You like it!
- ▶ It requires action and movement that can be seen by you and others.
- ▶ It takes time to do, involving preparation, doing it, and following up.
- ▶ It involves pain as well as joy; it includes struggle and discouragement.
- ▶ You have built skill and knowledge in this activity through time.
- ▶ You don't do it every day.
- ▶ You have returned to it over the years.

■ *What is more filled with hope than learning, our stock in trade?* ■

- ▶ It can be learned and enjoyed by both novices and masters.
- ▶ You think about it even when you're not doing it.
- ▶ You can talk with others about it or engage with others in doing it.

Now that you have selected that one activity, think about why it sustains you. Why do you keep doing it? What gets you through the hard times? Why do you keep coming back for more? And, if you were to answer all four of these questions in one sentence, what would you say?

For example, I keep returning to backpacking because it's so rewarding to reach beautiful vistas and experience the sense of accomplishment that comes with hiking a steep trail and reaching a beautiful place with friends. It is worth the exhaustion and wondering whether I will make it. I remind

myself that, despite my fears, I have made it every time—so far. Now, how would I express that in one sentence? That is what I'd like you to do. Write about your activity. Distill your answer to a few words or phrases.

What you just wrote about is what keeps you going, what sustains you, and what makes it likely you will return to that activity. My guess is that your sentence contains words related to learning, potential, motivation, truth, accomplishment, self-awareness, beauty, order, fulfillment, satisfaction, love, or achievement. Hope is created, nurtured, and resides in that one activity, and many others. In fact, you can learn from activities like the one you just thought and wrote about, and apply your learning to other things you do that you may not be as invested in. I know that I can learn from my backpacking experience and bring some of that learning to work. More than once, I have reminded myself of the rewards of perseverance. And often this image comes to mind: me on a steep switch-back trail where the immediate, needed, hard work is evident and the potential beauty is quite distant.

Do the same with your activity: Apply your short statement and its related thoughts to another activity that you are not as fond of, perhaps a work activity, but that meets many of the criteria described. See what comes to mind.

This shifting of frameworks and images suggests that there are other ways of seeing the world than the ones we habitually use. Seeing the world around me in a new way—such as, considering how a management meeting that I am suffering through is like backpacking—can expand my options and actions. And with the opening of options, comes the flowering of hope.

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