

Spread hope



Finding temporary and specific causes for misfortune is the art of hope. Finding permanent and universal causes for misfortune is the practice of despair. Boyd Clark

Years ago I counseled a husband and wife who were having severe marriage problems. Sitting in my office, they clung to opposite sides of the couch; the physical distance they maintained reflected the deep resentment they had for each other. At the end of the first session I gave my assessment: "You have a toxic relationship."

I didn't hear back from them for several weeks, so I called the wife to see if they intended to return for another session. She said, "No, Don, we're not coming back. The last thing you said to us was that we have a toxic relationship. That seemed to be your final conclusion. We left with no hope."

I learned a valuable lesson that day—I must always be a purveyor of hope.

I think hope is most helpful when paired with an understanding and acknowledgement of present struggle; otherwise, words of hope can sound glib, naive, or even patronizing. But when we fully embrace present difficulties, expressions of hope become believable. Regarding the past, be a realist; regarding the future, be an optimist and spread hope.

Leaders must be purveyors of hope, always giving an honest assessment of present reality but predicting a brighter future. Winston Churchill was realistic about the perils of World War II but conveyed a stubborn optimism about England's future. After the fall of France to the Nazis, many in England felt defeated, and a sense of resignation and impending doom hovered over the populace. In a speech given to the British

House of Commons, Churchill embraced the gravity of the situation—“The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us”—but he also spoke a message of hope and optimism that promoted a firm resolve and determination in the hearts of his countrymen—“Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, ‘This was their finest hour.’”

When was the last time you spoke words of hope to a discouraged person or group of people? Well that’s been too long. It’s really quite simple: acknowledge the challenge and then advance a realistic, plausible, and better alternative.

- Our sales for the month are down...but we can still make our quarterly goal.
- You’ve had a hard time finding a job...but I admire your constant effort; you’re going to land in a good place.
- Your business failed...but this will not define your life. You’ve learned a lot, and I have no doubt that you will succeed in the future.

Maintaining hope comes from seeing the potential in every situation and staying positive despite circumstances. G. Campbell Morgan tells the story of a man whose shop burned to the ground in the great Chicago fire. He arrived at the ruins the next morning carrying a table and set it up amid the charred debris. Above the table he placed this optimistic sign: “Everything lost except wife, children, and hope. Business will resume as usual tomorrow morning.” [John Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders Around You*, p72]