

The Power of Optimism

Written by Dr. Chris Alexander, PE | Saturday, July 8, 2017

Of all the traits that muster greatness in the lives of men and women, I am convinced there is no more important characteristic than optimism. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines optimism as,

The tendency to be hopeful and to emphasize or think of the good part in a situation rather than the bad part, or the feeling that in the future good things are more likely to happen than bad things.

Optimism is an essential ingredient for success in our individual lives, but it is especially important in the lives of leaders. In this article explore we explore the essential elements of optimism and its importance in the life of the leader.

The Elements of Optimism

As the previous definition conveys, optimism is focused primarily on a view of future events and is rooted in a sense of hope. The emotion of hope is the fuel that drives optimism. In the *Hunger Games* movie, President Snow commented, "Hope, it is the only thing stronger than fear. A little hope is effective, a lot of hope is dangerous. A spark is fine, as long as it's contained." As an American businessman, I am convinced that hope has been the single largest emotion that has contributed to the success of capitalism in this great nation of ours.

While not everyone is born an optimist, all of us can adopt traits that reflect an optimistic viewpoint. Consider the points listed below.

- Learn to see the "best" in situations; realizing things can always be worse (that's reassuring, isn't it?!)
- Seek the best in others and become a person of grace and forgiveness; don't see the world as "someone is always out to get me"
- Use our words and actions to build others up and not tear them down, remembering we should "believe half of what we see and none of what we hear"
- Develop a pattern of not over-reacting when encountering bad news, but doing our best to "extract" the best pieces of information
- Avoid gossip and communication that is hurtful to individuals and organizations

Optimism in Leadership

From the beginning of time, the question that has plagued mankind is whether or not leaders are made or born. Marcus Buckingham is his book, *The One Thing You Need to Know*, postulates that leaders are not made, but they are born. Great leaders have a vision of the future and get people to rally around their ideas, all driven by a sense of optimism. People who are in positions of authority who lack optimism are unable to communicate ideas for a better tomorrow; consequently, they rarely accomplish what they want or those around them hope they will accomplish. I have observed this in watching people in positions of authority flounder because of their inability to see their own weaknesses and are unable to provide a better future for the organizations they lead.

If you are not an optimist, here is my advice to you – *be leery of accepting a position of leadership*. If you have no other choice and being placed in a position of authority is required of you, surround yourself with people who are optimists. Even great leaders surround themselves with people who are strong where they are weak. For the non-optimist person placed in a position of authority, this is not only important, it is absolutely crucial.

Optimism is so important because every leader will encounter difficult times. Having a positive view of tomorrow allows leaders to convey that "all is not lost" and that through perseverance and the making of wise choices circumstances can change so that a better tomorrow is possible. Finally, great leaders cast a vision that inspires others to follow. Great visions communicate opportunities for advancement, compelling men and women to strive for individual success that ultimately result in positive growth of the organizations they serve.