

Give Them Hope

BY DAVID NELSON

Two of my favorite movies of the current season are about hope. A huge transition in the political landscape and a loss in the literary world also remind me of the importance of hope.

Slumdog Millionaire tells the story of a desperately poor young man who finds hope in the midst of poverty in the possibility of a relationship. It is not really about the search for wealth in monetary terms, but the search for the love of his life.

Milk is the true story of an important politician of our era. Harvey Milk of San Francisco rallies the disenfranchised to come together to support his candidacy for public office. After several failures, a friend tells him, "You have got to give the people hope."

John Updike was one of the most important literary figures in my lifetime. In his classic novels and his stories, memoirs, poetry, and critical musings, Updike invited readers to renew our hope in the everydayness of our lives.

The whole world watched as this nation transitioned from one administration to another in a peaceful and glorious method. Barack Obama captured the dreams of millions in his humble yet powerful words. His campaign and his life have been about the "audacity of hope." I am hopeful his campaign may rewrite the text of the American political agenda. We are tired of campaigns that only attack and tear down. Obama also discovered you have to give them hope.

What is true in movies, in literature, and in politics is also helpful in our personal and professional lives. Hope is so important. People want to believe in something and to commit to a vision. This is an important time for hope, in our relationships with clients, employees, and the public in general. Most people are struggling economically today. Unemployment is up as are foreclosures. The ebb and flow of national politics and economics continue. But one reality sticks. We all need hope.

In partnering with patients and with employees during good times and difficult times, it remains critical that our words and interactions contribute in positive ways. The eighth assumption of Appreciative Inquiry is "the language we use creates our reality." The very sounds coming from our mouths can create hope or can tear others' hearts. Recall some of the conversations you have had. Which ones gave you a stronger sense of well-being? Which gave you hope? How can you make every interaction a positive gift to the person you are addressing?



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Frederick Buechner in his book *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*, suggests hope is "wishful thinking." "Dreams are wishful thinking. Children playing at being grown-up is wishful thinking. Interplanetary travel is wishful thinking. Sometimes wishing is the wings the truth comes true on. Sometimes the truth is what sets us wishing for it." Give them hope. It may be in the language of hope that we set in place the journey for the good we all desire.

Give them hope. Look your life partner in the eye and ask about the good things about to happen in their day. Begin your staff meeting with a litany of the possibilities of the week ahead. Ask your children about their future dreams. And then listen as the stories of hope are spun. Listen for the rich texture of life that emerges in what others may see as ordinary. Listen to the reflections of your own mind that long for good. We are people of hope.

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