



Where There's Hope: Moving Forward

by KENDA RIGGS

"Yesterday ended last night. Today is a brand-new day." ~ Zig Ziglar

We are living through a worldwide pandemic, and this past year has been particularly challenging for many teachers. The 2020 CTF/FCE survey gave much insight into how teachers are doing across Canada, and the results were not surprising, bearing a common theme of teachers feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and exhausted. Given the current circumstances, experiencing these emotions is very understandable and a normal response to have during this global pandemic, which can also often lead to increased feelings of anxiety. However, efforts must be focused on ensuring that anxiety is prevented from taking over, as anxiety too, can spread like a virus. Therefore, we must take good care of ourselves and each other to remain strong and united. We must have hope.

Optimism versus Hope

Optimism and hope are often interchanged, but both are different concepts. Psychologist Charles Carver's research defined optimism as believing that your future will have good, positive experiences rather than negative ones. His research found that higher levels of optimism are related to better subjective well-being in times of difficulty, reporting that optimism is ultimately a state of mind. Optimism, however, differs from hope. According to psychologist Charles Synder, who specialized in positive psychology, hope is a positive motivational state, whereby individuals 'perceive' that they can walk certain paths leading to a desired destination. Synder identifies three components for hope:

- you need to have focused thoughts;
- you must develop strategies in advance to achieve clear and attainable goals;
- you must be motivated to make the effort required to reach these goals, even when it becomes difficult.

The more you believe in your own ability to achieve the components listed above, the greater the chance that you will embrace hope.

Focused Thoughts

Many people talk about hope in general terms, such as 'I hope

to get out to pick up my groceries tomorrow', or 'I hope that the weather isn't too messy tomorrow'. However, hope is much deeper than this. Hope is about focusing your thoughts to envision a more positive future, even when circumstances are happening around you that make it seem like there is not much to hope for.

It is important to acknowledge that sometimes, in periods of difficulty, there can be feelings of hopelessness. When feeling hopelessness, it is often due to *external* experiences that have occurred or are taking place in our lives, such as death of a close loved one, diagnosis of an illness, job difficulty, ending of a relationship, parenting difficulties, worries about the sickness of a loved one, financial difficulties, caring for an aging parent, living through a pandemic – the list can go on. It is important to realize that although the situation is external to you, the feelings

of hopelessness that you may be experiencing come from inside you. The ironic thing is the *solution* to hopelessness must also come from inside of you.

The January/February Bulletin article was about resilience and you. Hope helps bring about resilience,

as having hope means having the belief that things will be different in the future. Hope is about self-preservation, with a goal on thriving rather than just surviving. When you believe in yourself, and the fact that you can accomplish goals that you focus your thoughts on, this helps motivate hope to grow. Research has shown that the human capacity for hope is so strong that even when you may feel there is no hope, you can still find it.

Visualizing Attainable Goals

Hope involves visualizing attainable goals and setting strategies to achieve your goals. At this time, I invite you to reflect upon what your goals are. Not having a goal is like sailing in a river of water without a destination. Visualization can often help with goal setting and is a wonderful way to 'see' yourself a particular way. If you close your eyes for a moment, how do you visualize yourself:

- How much stress do you see around you?
- What does it look like?
- How do you look with less stress around you?

"Everything that is done in the world is done by HOPE."

~ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

- What thoughts are going through your mind right now?
- How do you feel?
- What would YOU like things to look like?

Reflect upon what may be getting in the way of you achieving these goals. Start thinking about some strategies that could help you head towards that destination. The purpose of visualization is to help you start the process of developing goals for yourself and developing a stronger version of you.

Motivation

Motivation has been considered one of the most important reasons to move forward towards a goal, whereby our thoughts influence an action. This seems to be a simple concept to embrace, however it may not be easy. If it was, as human beings, reaching our goals would occur at a much quicker pace than it ever does! Mel Robbins, motivational speaker and author of “The Five Second Rule” describes one of the reasons why. She reveals that if you have an instinct or gut feeling to act on a goal, you should physically move towards that act within five seconds or your brain will try to stop you from doing it. Robbins explains that there is a five-second window between the moment you have an instinct to act and your thoughts stopping you. She says that when you feel yourself hesitate before doing something, count 5-4-3-2-1-Go and then move towards action. The counting will focus you on the goal or commitment and distract you from the worries, thoughts, and excuses in your mind that try to stop you. If you do not act on this instinct within five seconds, she indicates that you run the risk of remaining stagnant. This theory helps to understand the neuroscience in the brain of motivation, to help to bring awareness as you move forward towards action to achieve your goal towards hope for the future.

How Does Your River Flow?

Every day, people are searching for more peace and balance in their busy lives to have an easier flow in life. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, another prominent researcher who studied positive psychology, identified the concept of ‘flow’ to be a highly focused mental state conducive to productivity. He explains that people are happiest when they are in a state of flow—a state of concentration with a particular activity—and nothing else seems

to matter. This is often described as being in ‘the zone’. This flow state is an optimal state of intrinsic motivation, which is a satisfying activity to do.

So, let’s explore this flow state in relation to a river. Water flows down a river, and as it flows towards its destination, it picks up and drops sediment along the way. Rivers sometimes flow very calmly and peacefully in a relaxing manner, moving forward with ease as water gently flows over the rocks. Other times, after heavy rain, wind, or stormy weather, rivers can run very forcefully and turbulently, as the water crashes into the rocks. Just like our lives, when our river is calm and peaceful, we can control and express our emotions, choices, and behaviors with composure and thought. However, when the river is overflowing, there are moments whereby everything can be chaotic. We can become more reactive to situations, reacting emotionally rather than rationally, without properly thinking our behavior through. Take time to reflect upon:

- How does ‘your’ river flow?
- Are you able to enter the flow, whereby you are in the zone of intrinsic motivation?
- Are you reaching goals and having hope?
- What storms are in the way of preventing you from reaching your true happiness or pursuing your goals?
- What do you need to do to get into your ‘zone’?
- What gives you hope?

We are living at a time when it is not business as usual. Many people talk openly about having COVID-19 fatigue while being worried and scared about how this virus has been impacting all of our lives. There is hope for the future, as vaccine production is occurring, and we live in a province and country where we will have access. While we wait, it will be imperative to keep your river flowing as calmly as you can. Continue to do things that you enjoy and focus your mind away from stress. Take good care of yourselves and each other. Continue to be kind. We are moving forward. There is hope for the future!

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