



KEEP GROWING

Jim Knight

Hope requires that we believe we can get to our goal by taking the necessary steps along the path. The clearer the path, the more agency and confidence we'll have.

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HOW TO FOSTER HOPE IN TOUGH TIMES

At the beginning of every new year, I create a playlist for my friends filled with music that brings me joy. I call it my happy list. This year, as I chose my songs, I realized that a theme was emerging: new beginnings. As Nina Simone sings, “It’s a new dawn, it’s a new day, it’s a new life for me, and I’m feeling good” (Bricusse & Newley, 1965).

This year’s playlist gives voice to my deep desire to turn the corner on the tough times we’ve all experienced this past year. I know I’m not alone in wanting a new beginning. For many, 2020 was the hardest year of their lives.

In times like this, we can feel tempted to give up whatever fight we are fighting. Coaches and other professional developers and leaders may feel doubly frustrated as they struggle to help others feel hope while they struggle to keep the faith themselves. I urge you to keep moving forward and support your friends and colleagues as they move forward. We are learning more and more about hope, and while the research isn’t a guaranteed road map to success, it does identify several tangible actions we can take to remain hopeful.



1. FACE REALITY.

There are many excellent reasons to avoid reality. At times, almost all of us need the emotional protective bubble wrap of defense mechanisms just to negotiate the emotional terrain of everyday life.

The trouble is, as Miller and Rollnick (2013) explain, the motivation to move forward almost always comes from a discrepancy between where we are and where we want to be. So while turning our eyes away from the world may bring us some relief in the moment, it leads to avoiding learning, growth, movement, and, eventually, hope.

One way coaches can help others see reality more clearly is by offering to record them in action. The camera doesn’t lie, which is why I like to say video is like rocket fuel for learning. But not everything can be recorded, so it’s useful to identify friends and colleagues who are willing to tell us the truth about what they see. A coach, friend, or mentor may even help us see that we are being overly critical of ourselves and offer a more balanced view.

2. SET GOALS.

Hope researchers Snyder (1994) and Lopez (2013) describe hope as a process with three elements: goals, pathways, and agency. Goals are, in essence, our hoped-for future, and there is a mountain of research that tells us goals are important for motivation (see Halvorson, 2012).

Coaches can awaken others (and themselves) to their goals by asking powerful questions, like the famous question from solution-focused coaching (Jackson & McKergow, 2002): If you woke up tomorrow and a miracle had happened, and your class (or something else) was everything you hoped it would be, what would be different? What would be the first thing you would see that would show you that things have changed?

Goals must matter to the person being coached. That means people must choose the goals themselves.

3. IDENTIFY PATHWAYS.

We also need to see one or more pathways to the goal we have set so that we have a clear picture of how to reach it. When coaches partner with others to identify strategies for reaching goals, they foster hope. Sometimes this involves asking questions, such as: What advice would you give someone else with your goal? What have you done in the past to successfully meet challenges like this? (Campbell & Van Nieuwerburgh, 2018).

When necessary, coaches can suggest strategies teachers might try. However, how they share that knowledge is a complex communication challenge. If they direct teachers or act like know-it-alls, coaches take away ownership of the goal and, ultimately, take away hope.

4. TAKE ACTION.

Hope also requires that we believe we can get to our goal by taking the necessary steps along the path. The clearer the path, the more agency and confidence we'll have.

Coaches can make the pathway easier to follow by helping teachers

plan implementation of a strategy, explaining and modeling teaching strategies, and gathering data so that teachers can see their progress. Seeing our progress makes us more likely to believe that achieving the goal is possible.

In most cases, the best way to build momentum and deepen our agency is to take tiny steps forward and see the positive results. Coaches can help in this process by sharing specific, concrete, positive feedback. One true, specific observation delivered at the right time in the right way can stay with a person for a lifetime.

BE BRAVE

These are tough times, and that makes it all the more important to foster hope in others — and in ourselves. All of the strategies I've shared here can and should be applied by coaches and other professional learning leaders as well as teachers.

It takes bravery to persevere. But when we find the courage to look at reality, set goals, identify pathways, and build agency, we can foster hope. As

educators, we need to feel hope, because there is a lot worth doing.

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COACHES CORNER

 / Sharron Helmke

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perspective on it. Powerful questions can do this by fostering new insights. Knowing this allows us to support teachers by offering a question, in addition to — or even rather than — an offer of help. Questions like: Who's showing up but not yet mastering the content, and what do their mistakes tell us about their learning needs? What

assumptions are we making about our students, and what choices are we making based on those assumptions? How do we more effectively balance perspectives and voices in our planning meetings so our learning designs are more inclusive?

The challenge and opportunity we're being offered in 2021 is to meet teachers where they are while

supporting their sustained growth. We're being called to be both a supporter and a catalyst for change, to coach for growth *with compassion and situational awareness*. Meeting the need to embody these two roles, often considered opposites, will require we use 2021 to brighten both our coaching instincts and skills. ■

EQUITY IN FOCUS

 / Angela M. Ward

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personal sphere of influence to change the system and dismantle inequitable practices. Actions speak louder than words, so adjust your goals and objectives to hold yourself accountable and do your part to shape the learning environments where students feel safe, welcome, and included.

I hold myself accountable to the students in my care by working from my personal sphere of influence to dismantle inequity in our educational system. In the professional learning I facilitate, I pivot from the traditional approach of scripted lessons and strategies to center personal stories and connections. I invite colleagues to share their experiences and

stories to introduce new perspectives on longstanding issues. They enter these learning sessions often unaware of the ways institutional racism impacts them daily, but they leave with a collective commitment to improve educational practice. ■