

Embracing Hope in a Turbulent World: Five Steps for Global Leaders

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Jo Ann Ross

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There is a quote attributed to the great baseball legend, Yogi Berra: “If you come to a fork in the road, take it.” Yogi himself explains that in giving directions to his house, he simply meant that either path of the fork leads to his home. Just take the fork. Many global leaders are grappling with a (metaphorical) fork in the road these days as well. But unlike the road to Yogi’s house, there is a difference in the two paths of the fork, and your team’s morale and performance might be impacted by which one you choose.

Few global leaders escape the daily challenges of making a positive contribution when the future is uncertain. Every day most leaders rub shoulders with chaotic markets, at-risk global alliances (e.g., the European Union), and a nasty presidential race in the U.S. – not to mention a seemingly endless flow of migrants and the threat of terrorism worldwide.

When your perspectives about world events turn black, it’s time to stop, reflect, and ask yourself: What can I do personally to alleviate my own pessimism, and to offer my team inspirational messages of hope?

Think of this dilemma as a fork on the road of global success. Keep reading to discover where the silver-lined fork can be found.

As citizens of this planet, we are captivated by *all* of our world – the wicked, the beautiful, the atrocious, the joyful, the scandalous. Our reaction to the universe is often dependent on contemporary events. If the markets rebound, we’re happy. If our initiatives fail in Asia, we’re upset.

But there exists a side of who you are, a deep and fundamental you, that we’ll call your “wiser self.” Your wiser self knows that you do not control everything in life. You don’t control the markets, or the Brexit vote of the British people; and most of us have extremely little influence over world leaders. Tapping into this wiser self will allow you to offer your team the hope we all yearn for.

Five concrete steps will help you to move from the darkness into a bright, cloudless day.

Step #1: Acceptance

The first step towards peace of mind is to accept that there are some things in the world you cannot control. You can certainly attempt to influence global events – and dynamic, purposeful global leaders usually want to make the world a better place – but key events in the past will most likely not change much with just one (well-meaning) person’s best efforts. This is a hard-to-swallow realization for results-oriented leaders.

Of course, There *are* initiatives you can pursue, but first you need to accept that you sometimes have little control. Once you are able to do that, your shoulders might relax a bit. You might breathe easier, too. Accepting the world as it is lightens the tremendous burden we feel to fix it.

Step #2: Change in Attitude

After you’ve accepted your own limitations, it will be easier for you to adopt a more positive attitude, one of hope and optimism. Note, though, that if you don’t genuinely “own” these qualities, you won’t be in a good position to inspire your team. You can’t fake it. Your team members, being intelligent people, will sense your forced optimism. So if these times don’t elicit uplifting thoughts, how can you change your attitude? That brings us to step three.

Step #3: Uncovering the Good

You need to look for the Good in the world. Finding it will enable your wiser self to shine through. If gloomy situations all around evoke worry or judgments, our wiser selves are overshadowed. But the fact is that the world itself is not entirely evil or possessed (although on some days we might buy into that perspective). There are people who are doing admirable things. For example, there are political leaders who espouse high values and actually “walk the talk.” There are global leaders who are inspiring; some of them might be leaders of your organization. There are stories of sacrifice, selfless service, respect, and love. Such stories are what we need to unearth.

When we’re locked into pessimism or judgements, the Good is missing in action. We can’t see it because we’ve forgotten how to look for it. Whatever you put your attention on grows in your awareness. So focusing on what’s right in your world will help you begin noticing more of the Good. The smarter, wiser self knows that Goodness still exists. Is it possible that you need look no further than members of your own team for such examples?

Step #4: Understanding and Compassion

Now you’re ready to demonstrate compassion through understanding. Trying to feel compassion for others’ struggles, your team’s worries, or even a presidential candidate you don’t like, gradually softens your heart. It encourages your wiser self to kick in.

There’s no more powerful message than listening to people with respect, confirming your understanding of their position, and then offering them words of encouragement and compassion. This doesn’t mean that you condone inappropriate and high-risk measures of unethical leaders, but you do try to see the world from their perspective.

Step #5: Messaging and Action

This final step occurs when you can finally move to action. Once you’ve improved your attitude, dispensed compassion, and unveiled your precious wiser self, let her sing. Your wiser self can lead your team towards the hope we all crave. A positive message, peppered with optimism and stories of the Good, will delight and inspire.

Sometimes your wiser self may decide that action is needed. Then not only your heart and tongue, but also your hands, will have a practical impact as you initiate and follow through on deeds to bring sustainable improvement to an untenable problem.

What's the Bottom Line?

The bottom line is that we can make our world better and embrace hope in these hard times. That means deliberately selecting carefully when we encounter the fork in the road. Instead of going down the path of worry and dark thoughts, we can decide to take the other path, the one that leads us to optimism and hope. That is what inspiring global leaders do.

