

## Making Hope a Habit

Back in April, Shane Lopez—the world's leading expert on the psychology of hope—came to Emporia State to deliver the inaugural lecture in the Teachers College series. He shared some powerful lessons I've been think about ever since.

Lopez, a Gallup scientist and a business professor at the University of Kansas, used research from the largest study of hopeful people ever conducted to come to some surprising conclusions. Hope isn't just an emotion, he claims, but an essential life tool. And hope isn't tied to income, or to intelligence, or to luck.

Yet, hope is one of the biggest predictors of success in life—from relationships to academics to business.

In his new book, "Making Hope Happen: Creating the Future You Want for Yourself and Others," Lopez gives examples of how hopeful people can creative positive change, from a 12-year-old Kansas girl facing her second heart transplant to the city council of Greensburg, which developed a visionary recovery plan just days after an F5 tornado reduced their town to rubble.

"When we're hopeful, our ideas and feelings about the future work together," Lopez writes. "Our thoughts look ahead and tell us what we need to do today to get where we want to go. Our feelings lift us up and give us the energy to sustain our effort. Hope is the work of the heart and the head. Hope happens when our rational selves meet our emotional selves."

And hope is uniquely human.

Lopez tells the story of Jean-Marie Chauvet, who noticed a draft of air coming up from a cleft in the rocks during a hike in the hills of southern France in 1994. With the help of two friends, Chauvet explored a tunnel that led to a series of chambers which held the earliest and most magnificent cave paintings ever discovered: mammoths and horses and rhinos—and the depiction of one very pregnant woman—all rendered in 30,000-year-old red ochre.

The paintings by these long-dead ancestors still carry their story to us. They hoped and dreamed like us. And like them, we create our own stories—and are constantly rearranging the narratives of our lives.

"Little by little," Lopez writes, "we choose to make our stories less hopeful or more hopeful. Hopeful narratives steeped with meaning provide survival tools for the storyteller and the audience

gathered around the campfire."

But narratives are a two-edged sword. They can be hopeful—or hindering.

The difference between creating a narrative that is hopeful and one that is fearful— and locks us into inaction—is our mindset. Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck coined the term "mindset" for our beliefs about ourselves and the future. If you have a fixed mindset, Lopez explains, you believe that your talents and abilities are set in stone and are less hopeful about the future. But if you have a growth mindset, you know that you can develop your talents and abilities.

What I especially like is that the strategy Lopez outlines is firmly rooted in reality.

"Wishing ourselves into failure and loss is bad enough," he writes. "But when we push our wishful thinking on others and call it hope it is potentially destructive."

Hope isn't about wishful thinking, which can result in a deadly mix of inaction and unrealistic expectations, or positive thinking, which carries the subtle message that if you don't succeed, you just didn't think positively enough.

"I sometimes describe hope as the golden mean between euphoria and fear," Lopez explains. "It is the feeling where transcendence meets reason and caution meets passion. This interplay between hopeful thoughts and feelings is dance-like... We draw on our memories of the most hopeful people we know, of our own hopeful pursuits, and of our successes at getting out of tight spots in the past. These thoughts and feelings may help us see pathways where others see brick walls. We persevere when others give up; we work harder when it would be easier to quit. And the whole time, we are carried along on a current of energy to a better place in the future."

Now, more than ever, it's important that we work on achieving a growth mindset and not give up our hope for the future. Luckily, the one thing we can't afford to be without doesn't cost a dime to practice.

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