

## Mount Hope

On 3 December 1908, Ernest Shackleton recorded:

*"We reached the base of the mountain which we hoped to climb in order to gain a view of the surrounding country [...] From the top of this ridge there burst upon our view an open road to the south, for there stretched before us a great glacier [...] stretching away south,"*

From this vantage point Shackleton and his south polar party gained their first sight of the glacier that provided the route to the polar plateau and the South Pole itself. The hill that provided this vantage point and for the promise it provoked, Shackleton called **Mount Hope**.

Every leader has the responsibility and privilege of taking their team, sometimes clambering over difficult and challenging environments (whether they be social, emotional or financial) and bringing them to a point where hope is stirred, courage nurtured and energy ignited. The phrase "Leaders are dealers in hope" (Napoleon) encapsulates the unwritten but expected trait of all who lead. They are the ones who must generate and point to hope. Nothing distinguishes a leader and persuades others to remain followers, as much as one, who through decisiveness of vision and encouragement of achievement, creates a sense of hope.

Managers and leaders are competent at reciting most measurable statistics to do with their business. They can recite their ROI, ROA, returns per sq.metre, growth in turnover, profits per staff member, etc. quite easily. However ask them about the 'hope quotient' of the team, and their eyes glaze over with bewilderment wondering what on earth is the relevance of such a question.

Given the adverse affects that the absence of inspiration or hope have upon the mental and emotional competencies of people, one would imagine that training in the importance of minimizing despair, discouragement and anything that unduly creates these conditions would be amongst the primary lessons in leadership development.

Important as it is to develop and maintain a sense hope, it is equally crucial that hope is not dashed or treated carelessly. Many years ago King Solomon said "Hope deferred makes the heart sick." Who of us has not felt the utter despair of deferred or dashed aspirations? Deferred hope makes more than the heart sick. Victor Frankel, a prisoner of Auschwitz, wrote about the serious consequences of continuous and absent hope:

*Those who know how close the connection is between the state of mind of a man – his courage and hope, or lack of them and the state of immunity of his body will understand that the sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect.*

He goes on to record that the medical records of the Auschwitz concentration camp showed that the death rate in the week between Christmas 1944 and New Year's Day 1945 were awful. They...

*"increased in the camp beyond all previous experience. In his opinion (Camp doctor's) the explanation for this did not lie in the harder worker conditions or in the deterioration of our food supplies or a change of weather or new epidemics. It was simply that the majority of the prisoners had lived in the naïve hope that they would be home by Christmas. As the time drew near and there was no encouraging news, the prisoners lost hope and disappointment overcame them. THIS HAD A DANGEROUS INFLUENCE ON THEIR POWERS OF RESISTANCE AND A GREAT NUMBER OF THEM DIED. (Victor Frankel pg.97 'Mans Search for Meaning')*

The readers of this newsletter are unlikely to ever produce that kind of disappointment in their followers! But responsibility, innovation and productivity do die when discouragement and attitudes "of what's the use / why bother" prevail in companies.

The remarkable truth is that hope and encouragement are usually developed in the most understated and natural of circumstances. An informal discussion about a staff member's after hour interests, asking after their family, affirming the value of their contribution, inviting their contribution to a discussion, have a way of making others feel included and thereby significant.

Frankel, quoting Nietzsche, makes the point that "**he who has a why to 'live for' can bear with almost any how**" The privilege of organizational leadership, in the arena of the business, is to be the prime articulator of that 'why' and then to provide the fuel of encouragement and inspiration for its achievement.

Until next time Yebo!

**P.S. Have you visited [www.stennyafrika.com](http://www.stennyafrika.com)**

