



LIBBY GILL & COMPANY

Why Hope Is Your Best Strategy Right Now

Yeah, I know. We've all said, "Hope is not a strategy" or "Hope is not a plan." Yet, in the time of COVID-19, hope may be the best strategy we have.

Let me explain.

The notion that hope is the bedrock upon which all of work and life rest—the essential ingredient that gets us out of bed and able to face each day—came to me with crystal clarity shortly after I got my first job in corporate entertainment. I'd been hired as an assistant in the public relations department of a television production and distribution company founded by the legendary TV producer Norman Lear, creator of such hits as *All in the Family* and *One Day at a Time*.

But on the dawn of the morning I was scheduled to start my new job, I learned that my stepmother had committed suicide while my father, a physician, was asleep in the next room. After a week-long visit back home to Florida, I returned to Los Angeles accompanied by heartbreak, confusion, and my stepmother's full-length mink coat. Although I had no interest in mink, my stepmother's or anyone else's, my father wanted me to have her prized possession so I dutifully took it home with me.

Work became my refuge until a few months later when the grief, despair, and exhaustion finally caught up with me and, after a drink or three, I decided to try on the mink coat for the very first time. Before I could even don the matching hood, I collapsed on the floor of my apartment, the physical and emotional weight of that ensemble too much to bear. After hours

lying on the floor wrapped in the mink (I know, pathetic), a thought, that felt like a call to action from above, popped into my head and got me back on my feet. I had absolutely no idea what the strange phrase meant at the time, but it stuck with me like a mantra for years. *Hope and tools*.

Hope played a role when I wrote a book called *Traveling Hopefully* about the journey of self-discovery and personal growth. Then, when I became an executive coach specializing in helping leaders deepen purpose and drive performance, I encountered the science of *hope theory*, based on a body of research from the medical and positive psychology communities. Finally, it was like all the pieces clicked into place. When hope is framed as *active* rather than *abstract*, it's easy to see why hope is precisely what we need in our current environment of fear and uncertainty. Unlike its emotional cousins happiness and optimism, which are generalized feelings of well-being, hope is specific, situational, and future-focused. In other words, hope ties beliefs to behaviors which, in turn, become outcomes.

The concept of hope theory was pioneered by the late Dr. C.R. Snyder, a professor of psychology at the University of Kansas at Lawrence. Dr. Snyder defined hope as based on both "*willpower*" and "*way-power*," where one is able not only to create multiple pathways to realizing a vision, but also to sustain the mental energy and perseverance to travel those pathways effectively. With the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, that type of flexibility is not only critical for our sanity, but also necessary for businesses to be able to pivot successfully.

Among the advantages of having a high level of hope (again, not to be confused with optimism's generalized outlook on life independent of one's actions and circumstances), Dr. Snyder's research showed that hopeful people are more likely than non-hopeful people to:

- Set a great number of goals
- Set goals which may be more difficult to attain
- Be more successful at reaching their goals
- Experience greater happiness and less distress while pursuing their goals

Adding to the pioneering research of Dr. Snyder is Harvard-trained oncologist Dr. Jerome Groopman, one of the world's leading researchers on cancer and AIDS and the author of *The Anatomy of Hope*. According to Dr. Groopman, hope consists of two key components: belief and expectation. More specifically, belief that change is possible and the expectation that the actions of an individual can result in a better future. Obviously, if you believe that change is possible (which not everyone does) and that your actions will have a positive influence on outcomes, you're less likely to give in to others' negative assertions and more likely to look at the future in new ways, inspiring others with your behavior. Conversely, if you believe the opposite is true, that change is impossible and it makes absolutely no difference what actions you take, you're apt to stay stuck in complacency, a luxury we simply can't afford right now.

As a clinician, Dr. Groopman observed early in his career that when he gave cancer patients too much information regarding their prognoses, he often robbed them of hopefulness, which he and many other scientists agree is instrumental in the healing process. On the other hand, when he gave them too limited information, he ran the risk of creating the false impression that all was well. What Groopman's research makes clear is that, unlike wishfulness or positive thinking (without action), hope can have a physiological impact on the brain, releasing powerful chemicals like enkephalins and endorphins that help us endure pain and boost our immune system. With that kind of healing power, imagine what a sense of hopefulness can do for your workplace.

It was precisely this challenge of helping clients shift from *false hope*, characterized by complacency and inaction, to *true hope*, where positive beliefs drive behaviors, that propelled me to create the ***True Hope Process***[™] for my clients. The process is founded on the principle that when individuals, teams, and organizations are driven by passion toward a shared vision, yet grounded in pragmatism, they can accomplish more than they'd ever thought possible. Here is a brief overview of the process.

1. ***Clarify the Vision***

- Describe your best, yet realistic, vision of the future.
- Determine if it is within your power to achieve or attain it.
- Identify the beliefs that will need to shift in order realize the vision.

2. ***Simplify the Pathway***

- Articulate your vision to the widest possible audience.
- Solicit feedback regarding needed resources and support.
- Overcome perceived or actual obstacles in your path.

3. ***Execute the Plan***

- Transform vision into specific and measurable action plan.
- Assign project oversight and task ownership.
- Balance factors for accountability with the need for flexibility.

4. ***Review, Reflect, Repeat***

- Measure success against pre-determined metrics and milestones.
- Capture feedback for people, process, and profit improvement.
- Course correct and/or begin a new project based on review.

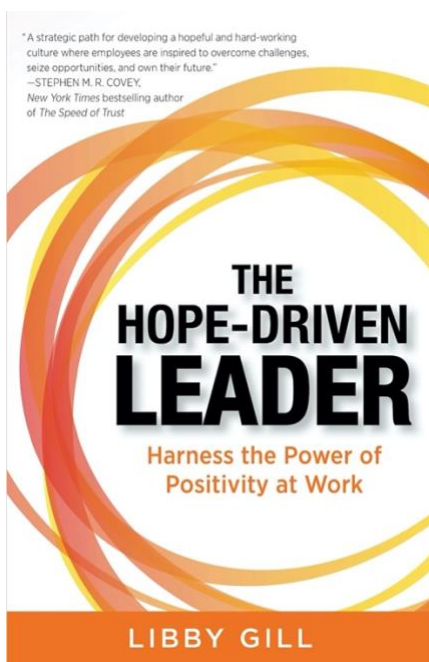
It's been years since I lay on the floor wrapped in that mink coat wondering what the strange mantra-like phrase, *hope and tools*, had to do with me. Now, having written *Traveling Hopefully* about the journey of change in one's personal life and my latest book, *The Hope-*

Driven Leader, about the significance of hope in the workplace, I am approaching my twentieth anniversary as an executive coach. And I am still discovering more about hope every day.

Editors/Producers – Kindly link back to LibbyGill.com upon posting this article.

*Libby Gill is an executive coach, leadership expert, and international speaker. She is the former head of communications and PR for Sony, Universal, and Turner Broadcasting. Author of award-winning *You Unstuck: Mastering the New Rules of Risk-taking in Work and Life*. Her latest book is *The Hope-Driven Leader: Harness the Power of Positivity at Work*. Her next book, focusing on developing leadership programs for young adults, is co-authored with Brigadier General Thomas Kolditz, PhD. in conjunction with Rice University's Doerr Institute for New Leaders.*

Learn more about Libby's work at www.LibbyGill.com.



"THE HOPE-DRIVEN LEADER: HARNESS THE POWER OF POSITIVITY AT WORK"

"Far from being an abstract concept, Gill lays out a strategic path for developing a hopeful and hardworking culture where employees are inspired to overcome challenges, seize opportunities, and own their future." Stephen M.R. Covey, Author of #1 Bestseller *The Speed of Trust*

"Libby Gill offers us a roadmap to be positive and hopeful for the future. This is a must-read for those of us ready to embrace true hope!" Marshall Goldsmith, Author of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Triggers*

"This is a book for anyone who dreams big, cares for others as well as themselves and who fearlessly tackles each day as it comes." Tracey Noonan, CEO & Co-Founder of Wicked Good Cupcakes, Inc.

**The Hope-Driven Leader is available in trade paperback, Kindle, and Audiobook.*