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THE HBR LIST

Breakthrough Ideas for 2007

Our annual survey of emerging ideas considers how nanotechnology will affect commerce, what role hope plays in leadership, and why, in an age that practically enshrines accountability, we need to beware of "accountabalism."

Barbara Perry (barbara@puttinghope.towork.com) a cultural anthropologist and management consultant, are the authors of *Putting Hope to Work: Five Principles to Activate Your Organization's Most Powerful Resource* (Praeger, 2006).

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and spiritually—or perhaps declaring that one's organization needs hope feels defeatist. "If I set out to instill hope," one might wonder, "am I admitting that our situation is next to hopeless?"

Yet work connected to the positive-psychology movement has made hope discussable in new ways. Hope has been shown to be the key ingredient of resilience in survivors of traumas ranging from prison camps to natural disasters. Many studies have shown that people who score higher on measures of hope also cope better with injuries, diseases, and physical pain; perform better in school; and prove more competitive in sports. Our contribution has been to outline the elements of hope—possibility, agency, worth, openness, and connection—in a way that guides efforts to nurture it in the workplace. The first two are central to the definition of hope: People must see that change is possible and how they can engage personally in that change. The remaining elements have to do with how hope is cultivated in organizations: Hopeful work groups are most often composed of individuals whose worth to the organization has been affirmed, who perceive an openness on the part of management, and who enjoy an authentic sense of connection with their colleagues and with the organization's mission. Even so briefly described, these elements suggest why hope can be an energetic force for positive change to a degree that, say, optimism alone could never be.

Our study of effective executives has uncovered many ways in which their decisions, words, and actions make the people they lead more hopeful. Collectively, these practices are the basis of a leadership tool kit for building and sustaining hope. But the most important change comes when a leader is simply more mindful of this vital part of her or his mission. Much can be accomplished in a reflective pause to ask, "Is what I am about to do or say likely to be destructive or accretive of hope?" It is useful to notice how people express a sense that things might change for the better: They often say of some key actor, "He gives me hope" or "She gives me hope." If you are an executive trying to lead an organization through change, know that hope can be a potent force in your favor. And it's yours to give.

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5. The Leader from Hope
What is hope? Something more than wishful thinking but short of expectation. A rejection of cynicism and dispiritiveness. And a state, we believe, quite central to the work of a leader. Most business leaders, we've discovered in our three years' worth of interviews on the subject, shy away from the word. Perhaps talk of hope comes uncomfortably close to faith