Listen to Their Cries

Chippewa Prayer

Grandfather,
Look at our brokenness,
We know that in all creation
Only the human family
Has strayed from the sacred way.
We know that we are the one
Who divided
And we are the ones
Who must come back together
To walk in the sacred way.
Grandfather,
Sacred one,
Teach us love, compassion, honor
That we may heal the earth
And heal each other.
Some time ago, I discovered this moving Native American prayer, and I’ve been sharing it with various groups at appropriate moments. It is not only our Millennials, the “Crucible Generation,” who respond and make it their own, it moves with meaning across the generations. As we like to say, “it shines a light” in the perceived darkness of our times:

- Every nine seconds a child in our country drops out of school
- When 70 percent of below-poverty-level children have no high school diploma, and 30 percent of all American children have no high school diploma
- When the political debates are filled with ugliness and almost venomous dialogue in the public square
- When veterans are coming home struggling with health, housing, and finding a place in the workforce

All this is part of the backdrop for this column, yet it is only part. How can we face the summer of 2012 with hope, hope for the present and hope for a future we cannot yet describe?

Some of our greatly respected readers—familiar with my “B-Positive” blood type—may have reservations. Yet if we are doing what Peter Drucker charged us to do, “Look out the window and see what is visible but not yet seen,” we will find emerging trends that spell “bright future.”

### Three Messages of Hope

Encouraging are the changes, the developments, the leaders who find the courage to send out the message of hope—one of my favorite four-letter words, second only to love.

Hope it is then, that we share, defined in ways not challengeable. And one of the first messages is, “We care for all of our children.” No child is invisible and our goal is superior schools and teachers in every neighborhood, with supplies—and facilities—equal across the school spectrum. “Dropping out” is unacceptable to our 2012 leaders at every level, in every neighborhood, in every community.

We can point to social sector organizations, like 826 National, whose child-focused volunteers are—today—inspiring our next generation to be imaginative thinkers and creative problem solvers. We find examples of hope-charged schools like Poly Prep Country Day School in Brooklyn, New York, whose mission is to prepare and inspire the next diverse generation of leaders and global citizens to act with intelligence, imagination, and—above all—character. This is where we find hope for our children, which will serve as a catalyst to carry us right into the far and bright future.

Our second message of hope—regarding our shared concerns of the lack of civility, the language being used by some leaders to describe people and situations—is the refrain, “Communication is not saying something; communication is being heard.” All around us are examples of hopeful civility through collaborative dialogue:

- At noon on February 11 I had the privilege of joining Richard Heffner on PBS for his half-hour program Open Mind, a dialogue that airs every Saturday at noon.

Heffner is the historian who has been the host of Open Mind since the first broadcast in May 1956. He interviews candid, provocative, and always revelatory men and women who have dissected national
politics, clarified the law, molded the media, shaped race relations, set the agenda for women’s rights, explored medicine, and chronicled or created the American scene and pop culture.

• The indispensable partnership of our Institute’s governance and management board and staff: board members and management together determine the important issues and the agenda of the organization. Through openness, trust, and shared vision and mission, we find that “What do you think about this?” is far more effective than “Now, hear this” for both governance and management.

For our third message of hope—for the military service members and their families—we look to initiatives including the White House’s “Joining Forces,” which mobilizes all sectors of society to give this cherished population the opportunities and support they have earned; or to the Military Child Education Coalition’s Living in the New Normal Institute, which encourages families to ensure their children have tools to bounce back from life’s storms and stressors, fosters community support efforts, and provides concerned adults with information to help support children during times of uncertainty, trauma, and loss.

The Reality of Our Times

So today, hope, respect for all people, and bright future are three of the battle cries that will move us forward into that future we will define, and bring alive, for all of our children.

This is not nice Pollyanna talk. It is the reality of our times, as difficult as they are for all too many American families. And from what we are observing “looking out the window,” when we all pull together and strengthen American institutions that can take the lead, Hope is not just a nice, evocative way of expressing our desired future; hope is the power that will bring us all together. And this is not just wishful thinking.

Many of you know that the day before Thanksgiving, we buried my son, my only child—a brave soldier who had suffered terribly for the past eight years. He loved his country, he loved the Army, and he loved his family, particularly Isabella Frances, three years old, who would crawl up on his home hospital bed up until she could kiss his cheekbone and say, “I wuv you, granddaddy.”

His Army burial service was so moving and healing that I will carry it with me always. When an Army bugler sounded Taps in that old and beautiful National Veterans Cemetery near Sacramento, I knew John was smiling. It gave me hope for all the days to come.

I believe we are on the cusp of a new kind of significance in the days ahead, whatever the challenges. We see the challenges as opportunities to help, to change lives, to bring hope to all who share our future—ensuring that, indeed, it will be a bright future.

Our long-ago Native American brothers and sisters, whose names were on the rivers, delivered their message in tenuous times. Can we do less?

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