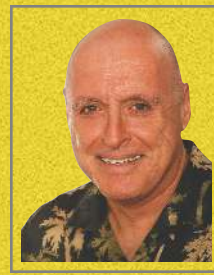


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1178 Ultimate Faith vs. Being Carried Away by Optimism

Scenario: You have faith that you'll achieve an important goal. You believe. Question: Can uncontrolled optimism that you will do so be an impediment to successfully reaching your ultimate objective? We'll talk about that, next, on The Extra Point.

Does the name James Bond Stockdale ring a bell? "Jim" Stockdale reached the rank of Vice Admiral in the US Navy, and was Ross Perot's running mate in the 1992 Presidential election.

Stockdale is best known as the highest ranking US military officer to be imprisoned in the "Hanoi Hilton" prisoner of war camp. He was there for eight years, four of those in solitary confinement.

He helped organize prisoner resistance, was tortured regularly, yet never gave his North Vietnamese captors the information they demanded.

When he learned he was to be paraded in public and used as propaganda against the United States, Stockdale used a razor to disfigure himself so they couldn't do that. It's a compelling and truly amazing story of one man's will to stay on point for the people he led, even in a prison camp, and to survive under horribly stressful circumstances.

When author Jim Collins wrote his acclaimed book, *Good to Great*, he had the opportunity to interview Stockdale, and dug deep to learn how he had come through imprisonment in North Vietnam, when others did not. What Stockdale told him was jaw-dropping and serves as a lesson to everyone.

Stockdale outlined the experience, and his surviving came down to two concepts. One, now known as the Stockdale Paradox, you must maintain unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties.

The second, a companion concept, says that

you must have the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever those facts might be.

Stockdale said he never lost faith in how the story would end, never doubting that he would get out of the prison and would ultimately prevail. That said, he clearly understood the reality of his situation and the focus it would require to be successful.

Collins then asked him who were the people who didn't make it out. Stockdale said it was the optimists who built up their hopes on factors they thought would make a difference.

Stockdale pointed to those who said, "We're going to be out by Christmas." Christmas would come and go, and they'd still be there. Then they'd say, "We're going to be out by Easter," and Easter would come and go. The optimists, said Stockdale, eventually died of a broken heart. Their hopes would rise and fall over and over, and they finally gave up.

Stockdale told Collins, "You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end, which you can never afford to lose, with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality."

The paradox and the leadership lesson for all of us is that we should never give up hope, but we can never deceive ourselves about our true condition.

This also translates to our role as the leader of a team. A leader has to personify hope. That hope which you have and should be written all over your face every day, should never lead to sugarcoating troubles, to pull punches, to dance around the truth of the situation. People may not like the truth, but they deserve it.

Telling people the truth means they won't be blindsided by it.

(Con't.)

If you lie to them or hold back on the facts, and they learn about that the hard way, how can they trust you moving forward? If trust is gone, what reason could they have for hope?

By presenting those facts, then giving a plan to deal with your problem, people feel respected and that you trust them, and there's a better chance for them to come together and focus on a solution.

That focus should be about what we have to do right now, today, to give us the best chance to get to tomorrow. Then, what do we do tomorrow to get to the next day?

Each day builds hope and strengthens faith. Jim Stockdale and others paid a huge price to give us this leadership lesson. Make good use of it.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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