

What Could Be Better Than the Present?

by Mike Hawkins
mike@alpinelink.com



When you think about what makes life enjoyable, what do you think about? Your family? Friends? Hobbies? Faith? Fulfillment from work? Satisfaction from helping others? Or is there something more fundamental that gives you joy?

When you are away from your family, but pause to think about them, do you smile mentally if not physically. Why? While you may not be with them, you know you have the opportunity to be with them. So what is more important – actually spending time with family or having the reassurance that you can spend

time with them when you choose to?

Looking forward to pleasures like family is a source of comfort and joy. Same with looking forward to friends, faith, hobbies, and meaningful work. Thinking about pleasant things ahead is soothing and satisfying. So what do thoughts of spending time with family and friends, having faith, and pursuing meaningful goals all have in common? The answer is “hope.”

Hope is the essence of a great life. Hope is the anticipation of something happy and fulfilling ahead. It is the feeling and expectation of a better future. It is what fuels our excitement and enthusiasm. The thought of something better than what we have now sustains us through hard times. The thought of experiencing a future accomplishment drives us to work hard and give more discretionary effort. Ironically, this is why goals once accomplished sometimes leave us with a feeling of loss. We achieved our goal, but lost our hope.

This isn't to say that enjoying the present moment isn't important. Of course it is. Being happy now and choosing to enjoy your current activity is extremely important. If the future is all you think about, you will never enjoy the journey of getting there. But you can't merely enjoy today. You can't simply do what you want today without considering the impact you are having on tomorrow. You can't do what you most enjoy today in hopes that your issues will just go away. That is false hope. You can't expect to reap future rewards if you don't put in the effort that is required today. Hope is the quality that enables you to defer the fun, convenient, and easy for that which is more important. Hope enables you to endure short-term frustrations. Hope for tomorrow and the next day is what allows you to enjoy today that which might otherwise be of little enjoyment.

Looking ahead and having hope is especially important when your present circumstances are less than ideal. Whether going through grueling training for a race, preparing for a presentation, or getting through a tough spot in life, hope for better days ahead is what sustains people. Thinking about crossing the finish line, winning the sale, or overcoming a personal issue motivates people to practice, prepare, and cope. Financial woes, conflict with friends, arguments with family members, and illness are only tolerable when people see them as temporary rather than permanent. issues

Without hope, despair is the alternative. For people in difficult circumstances who can't see a way to a better future, they only feel hopelessness. People only have fear and anxiety when faced with an incurable disease or the inability to work. When a troubled relationship seems unrepairable, the feeling of loss is overwhelming. When a loved one passes, the loss is intolerable. No amount of present enjoyment can offset the anguish that comes from hopelessness.

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As important as enjoying the present moment is, it takes a back seat to having hope. If everything is great in your life, enjoy it and be grateful. But when the inevitable adversity comes your way, focus on your hope. Your hope will get you through it. You can't be depressed if you have hope. They are mutually exclusive.

To leverage the motivating and satisfying feelings that hope provide, consider what you hope for. For each important area in your life, think about the good times ahead. Think about what you hope to achieve. Identify the goals you want to attain. Realize that most any troubling circumstance you might be dealing with now is temporary. Move your attention from your current challenges to your brighter future ahead. Stop dwelling on past difficulties. Learn what you need to learn, forgive who you need to forgive, and look forward. Replace any sadness due to past circumstances with optimism for better times and the future accomplishments that lie ahead. Put your energy into setting new goals and making progress toward them. Or if you are helping someone else through their despair, do the same for them and help develop their hope.

In summary, enjoy the present moment and be grateful for what you have, but keep your hope alive for a better future. Get excited about making your current relationships even better and/or meeting new people. Make plans to get into better physical condition and enjoy better health. Get motivated by the prospects of increasing your skills, gaining new knowledge, adding more value to your job, and increasing your compensation. Cultivate your hope in whatever area you are interested to enjoy the benefits of having a positive outlook. As Helen Keller said, "Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence."

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com), and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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