

Hope as a Leadership Strategy

Hope looks the world full on, it looks reality in the face, and it refuses to accept that things have to be this way. And then this orientation of hope throws one's intelligence, one's energy, one's persistence, one's creativity and courage behind that insistence. – Krista Tippett

Hope is often seen as a fluffy emotion. It's sometimes mistaken for wishful thinking or idealism or even optimism, but we can instead begin to view hope as an orientation versus it simply being a virtue. We can look to hope as a way of seeing and moving through the world; a leadership strategy we can employ during times of uncertainty. In the face of profound, reasonable despair, hope is a calling, a practice, and a muscle. And, like any muscle, it can be flexed and strengthened.

Psychologist C.R. Snyder defined hope not as a feeling, but as a cognitive process — a way of thinking that helps people pursue goals even amid adversity.

He breaks hope into **three core components**:

1. **Goals** – Clear, meaningful targets we care about achieving. Hope begins with identifying something worth striving toward, both personally and organizationally.
2. **Pathways Thinking** – The perceived ability to generate routes to achieve those goals. People who are high in hope see multiple possible paths, not just one. When one route is blocked, they shift strategies rather than giving up.
3. **Agency Thinking** – The willpower or belief in one's capacity to act. This is the motivational fuel that says "I can do this. We can do this."

Hope declines when any one of these three is less than the others. For example, if you can't see any viable pathways, or if your sense of agency drops, cynicism takes over.

Hope = Vision of the possible (goals) + Belief in multiple routes (pathways) + Collective energy to act (agency + trust)