



Dream Big and Boldly

A childlike imagination inspires strong leadership

BY YASMIN L. STUMP, ESQ.

Last year, a white Persian kitten joined our family. Kodiak, or Kody as his nickname, is a fluffy bundle of boundless energy with wide, mischievous blue eyes. He became my trusted companion after the heartbreaking loss of two cats earlier within one year. While I have a plethora of stories about Kodiak during his feline youth, one is particularly apropos. Repeatedly, he would sit at the foot of my bed and stare intently above at the cord to the ceiling fan, which was many feet above him. This cord became so enticing to him that ultimately, he would sit up on his hind legs, stretch above to the cord and paw at it. He actually believed that the ceiling fan cord, a potential new cat toy, was within his reach. In my mind, I can hear Alicia Silverstone as Cher in the movie “Clueless” retort, “As if!”





While amusing, Kodiak’s conviction that the unattainable was within his grasp is admirable. He exuded self-confidence, enthusiasm, a lack of restrictions or limitations and was undampened by the seemingly impossible. Kodiak was dreaming big and boldly — the ceiling fan cord was the limit. While viewing Kodiak’s pursuit, I asked myself whether this humorous story about our precious pet could be parlayed into a lesson about leadership. Perhaps surprisingly, the answer is in the affirmative, so stay with me.

Kittens are like children. They view the world as boundless. Everything is new and replete with wonder, and anything is possible. Yes, a young girl presupposes, you can dress like Barbie and be an astronaut. All children dream and indulge in their fantastical imaginations. They do so until they become adults. That’s when the cynicism and fear of judgment and failure set in. Grown-ups abandon dreaming due to the apprehension that they will be labeled as “having their heads in the clouds” or be even more seriously ridiculed by others.

Dreaming is Not Just for Children

Despite being thought of as juvenile, dreaming is not just for children, and it is an integral part of being an effective leader. As Ken Burkey aptly notes in “Why Dreaming is Essential for Your Leadership,” published on Global Leadership Network’s website, “Leadership is about taking your dreams of making this world a better place and turning them into reality.” The dreams of leadership are critical to the health of an organization because they keep the organization fresh and current, allow for adapting to changing circumstances and promote an organization’s growth and viability.

While dreaming is significant to effective leadership, frequently, it is quashed by the internal critic who becomes more skeptical with age. Berkey observes, “Much too often, as we grow older, our leadership journey becomes more about playing it safe rather than living out those dreams. This is a place where leadership becomes, at best stagnant, and at worse, toxic and depressing.” In her Forbes article published

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FOLLOW YOUR DREAMS





in February 2020, author Melinda Fouts, Ph.D. specifically identifies the negative aspects that can paralyze leaders from realizing their dreams, which include “fear, limiting beliefs or energy, a lack of belief in yourself [and] limiting believers, otherwise known as the naysayers, dream squashers and dream-stealers.” Certainly, we have all encountered those individuals who are quick to criticize and resist leadership’s dreams and will vocalize all the reasons why they think a dream is improbable, particularly if it was not a dream that he or she conceived. Even worse are those individuals who appropriate another’s dream as their own.

Unfortunately, other external factors also inhibit a leader’s dreams. Mindfulness coach and author Bonnie Kowaliuk, MBA, confirms in a June 2022 online article, “Add global crises, media noise, and growing responsibilities, and you get a recipe for setbacks ... [E]xternal stressors make it difficult to hold on to faith and stay consistent.”

Banishing the Internal Critic, Naysayers, Dream-Stealers and External Stressors

So how can you banish the internal critic, naysayers, dream-stealers and external stressors? The genesis for leadership’s productive dreaming is attitude. The internal critic can be eliminated through fostering self-confidence and optimism. To avoid the naysayers and dream-stealers, Fouts recommends asking if you envelop yourself with people who have a positive attitude and commitment. “As a leader, when formulating your team, you need to surround yourself with those who can hold the vision, those who can help create the map or plan of making it happen and those who will be able to say ‘We’re off track.’” External stressors will always be around. Many we cannot control. So, control the ones you can and rely steadfastly on your optimism and self-confidence to overcome the challenges you may confront.

Strong leadership also includes cultivating an awestruck view of the world. Burkey observes, “I believe that one of the keys to healthy, vibrant leadership, is to return to a child-like wonder and faith, and to dream again.” Genius Albert Einstein agreed that one should look at the world as a place of amazement. “There are two ways to live your life. One as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

Although traits like optimism, self-confidence and determination are fundamental to leadership’s prolific dreams, they do not automatically transform dreams into existence. “[A]mbition is only part of the equation,” Kowaliuk verifies. Rather, dreams are brought to fruition through manifesting. She explains that “[m]anifesting refers to making a goal or aspiration a reality with your thoughts, beliefs, feelings and behaviours. It means attracting something you want in your life by aligning your positive mindset, intention and actions.”

The Actions for Manifesting Your Dreams

Based upon my own personal experience and the topical literature, the actions to manifesting dreams include visualization, converting a dream into specific written goals and establishing realistic expectations. Visualization is imagining a future event. Scientific research supports the thought that visualization leads to realization of a dream. Kowaliuk expounds, “Visualizing an outcome before acting can help us assess how much we want it and figure out the steps needed to actualize it.”

Through visualization, we can determine the specific steps to attain our dreams, which dovetails into the second action — establishing goals. Break down your dream into specific, identifiable goals and write them down. In her January 2023 Psychology Today article “4 Science-Based Tips to Manifest Your Dreams,” author Tchiki Davis, Ph.D., notes that research proves that setting goals promotes their achievement, and as Davis confirms, writing down goals makes them even more likely that they will culminate. Celebrity psychologist Dr. Phillip McGraw said, “The difference between a dream and a goal is a timeline and an action plan.” While Dr. Phil’s statement may sound contrary to encouraging leadership’s dreams, it is not. Manifestation of leadership’s dreams involves more than just wishful thinking. Leadership must take action to make dreams a reality through writing them down, breaking them down into sequential phases and, as Dr. Phil recommends, creating a timeline to ensure accountability and that actualization of the dream remains on track. All this information should be shared with a leader’s optimistic and dedicated team members so they can be a part of, and take ownership in, manifesting a leader’s dreams.

Finally, to manifest leadership’s dreams, Dr. Davis advises to set positive, but realistic, expectations. There’s no question that positive thought advances manifesting leadership’s dreams. Realistic expectations should be established in terms of the plan and timeline. If the expectations are too aggressive, then a leader’s positive team members will become frustrated and lose their dedication because they are unable to realistically work to facilitate the dream. A leader’s dream is not manifested by the leader alone. Remember, teamwork makes the dream work.

As a leader, it’s okay to dream big and boldly and have your head in the clouds. Let your imagination go wild! If you augment your dreams with manifestation, including a plan and timeline, the sky’s the limit. ☺



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