



February 9, 2021

Dear Friends,

One of my favorite Ted Talks is by [Drew Dudley](#). In six minutes, he weaves together a wonderful story involving what he calls a “lollipop moment”- a time he changed someone's life for the better, without even realizing it. Prior to a freshman orientation, he was passing out lollipops as an invitation to educate the group about a local charity. A young woman, terrified and unsure of whether she should begin her collegiate experience, had an interaction with Drew and a young man standing next to her, which gave her the confidence to stay in school. Four years later the young woman sought Drew out to thank him for that moment and the resulting impact on her life. The outcome of the story caused him to rethink what typically defines “leadership,” resulting in a challenge to the audience to view leadership as the everyday act of improving each other's lives.

To lead, by definition, is to set an example for others to follow, to build trust through the demonstration of integrity, honest, reliability and accountability. The media is full of stories highlighting the erosion of trust in leadership. The COVID- 19 pandemic, which has resulted in nearly 2 million lives lost, in addition to loss of jobs and access to social support, has exacerbated the erosion of trust across the globe.

For me, during this time of global upheaval, there have been so many “lollipop moments,” where an unexpected “leader” has come into my experience demonstrating integrity and reliability and unknowingly had a positive impact on my life. Working in a field of hundreds of essential workers, Direct Support Professionals, I am in awe of their dedication and resilience. They have led with joy and creativity, navigated a new normal, and found ways to support and engage the people they support. They teach wonderful lessons in humility, and their passion and unselfishness set an example to follow.

The people Hope supports have also been powerful teachers and leaders during the pandemic. They live with even more restriction than most of us, and yet I have been witness to their joy in learning how to navigate technology, their focus on the moment and what they can do or learn, their patience in navigating months of adaptation, and their kindness in reaching out to see how I am doing.

If we define leadership as someone who chooses to act in way that improves others' lives, it can redefine who we choose to follow and why. Looking at leadership through this lens reminds us we all have the capability to lead. Activist and poet Amanda Gorman, the country's first ever National Youth Poet Laureate, recited an original poem “Chorus of the Captains,” before Sunday's Super Bowl game. Her words embody the true leader of today – those who uplift with action.

*Today we honor our three captains  
For their actions and impact in  
A time of uncertainty and need.  
They've taken the lead,  
Exceeding all expectations and limitations,  
Uplifting their communities and neighbors  
As leaders, healers, and educators.*

We all have the power to lead, to lift others up through actions of honesty, compassion, and joy. And these “lollipop moments”, whether given or received, will build trust, and help heal the world.

Best,

Michele Girault  
Executive Director  
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