



## **Martin Luther King, Jr. Did Not Say, "I Have A Strategic Plan!"**

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When he stood in front of the Lincoln Memorial with hundreds of thousands of people waiting, Martin Luther King, Jr. was not to disappoint them. He chose not to use an overhead presentation or pass out a brochure. Dr. King was there to inspire. He chose his words carefully. They came from his heart, not from an intellectual matrix analysis of opportunities and threats. He did not ask for a show of hands. He did not look for consensus because he was asked to lead, not to manage.

What Reverend King did say which, without doubt every American past, present and future will always remember, was simply, poetically, passionately, and with conviction, "I Have a Dream!"

Most importantly, at the end of his speech he did not take a vote to see who shared his dream. It was a dream, not a proposition or a resolution or an amendment or even an ordinance. It was what America needs from time to time and that is a dream.

Today's leaders have chosen not to dream, but to manage. Inspiration has been replaced with consensus. "We need 'buy in' before we can move forward," is the most common excuse offered as an explanation for an inability to make a decision. Our leaders have in fact become managers. They hold staff meeting after staff meeting. They poll, survey, build consensus and then discover that the train, which they had been asked to direct, has left the station. They now chase it down the track wondering how or when they missed it. We have learned management by objectives, strategic planning, and zero based budgeting, re engineering, and total quality management.

We do not have a problem with those processes and strategies, but we have concluded that those are processes designed by managers for managers, not for leaders.

It's a simple formula that Dr. King understood. Leaders lead and managers manage.

Unfortunately, we use those words interchangeably and they are not interchangeable. Great leaders do not make good managers and great managers do not make good leaders.

Kids at Hope has had the unique, fascinating, and sobering experience of sharing a dream with America. The dream seemed as simple as King's dream when he said he wanted children to be judged by "the content of

their character not by the color of their skin.”

The Kids at Hope dream is that “all children are capable of success, no exceptions!”

As that dream was promoted, we regularly reflected on Dr. King’s efforts. How often was he dismissed? How often did well intended people, many in supposedly leadership positions who said they polled their staff, or their constituents or they added up the pros and cons, conclude it was not time to disturb the status quo. It wasn’t time to lead, but to continue to do the same thing day in and day out.

We had the opportunity to meet with national leaders, or were they managers? We had the opportunity to meet with regional leaders, or were they managers? We had the opportunity to meet with local leaders, or were they managers? We guess Dr. King did as well. And he obviously learned what we learned and that was there are very few leaders but there are literally millions of good managers.

We had the opportunity to study managers and leaders during our journey and here are our observations:

When a dream is shared the first thing a leader or manager will do or say:

A leader will always ask how is this going to make a difference.

A manager will always ask how much is this going to cost or how much time is it going to take.

A leader will always focus first on the constituency it’s supposed to help.

A manager will always focus on the staff or people whose reactions concern them.

A leader will re-prioritize and truly determine what is important if the dream is consistent with their mission.

A manager will always first consider how busy they are and how much more they can do.

A leader will have no difficulty understanding the importance the dream.

A manager will ensure that there are more reasons not to do it than to do it regardless of the value of the dream.

A leader understands that a dream includes everybody and is less concerned with his or her self-interest.

A manager is concerned more with their own organizations and the children they serve than all children. They may be able to think outside the box, but they cannot think outside their four walls.

A leader will always provide leadership for someone else’s dream if it right for children.

A manager can never lead someone else’s dream, but once it comes to being they can help manage it.

Albert Einstein once said that, “Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds.”

We don’t necessarily agree with Dr. Einstein. In some instances we have witnessed Dr. Einstein’s comment, but more often we have been more frustrated by managers who think within their organizations, their city limits or their state boundaries. They manage their infrastructures. They want to be the best in what they do and could care less if other organizations or schools or institutions are equally effective because it may minimize their achievements. When working with children our success lies in each and everyone’s efforts. And until

we reach a time when all children succeed, no exceptions, does it really make a difference who runs the best programs?

We believe if Dr. King was alive he would be surprised as to how casually and self-serving we treat our children's future. We talk about our programs, or our schools, or our agencies but not our children. We talk about our awards, our grants, our budgets, our buildings but not our children. We discuss our budgets, our salary administration programs, or pensions but not our children. We talk about how busy we are, how many meetings we need to attend, or how many reports we need to file, but not our children.

When Kids at Hope was conceived we did not start out with the statement that we have a business plan. We started out with the statement that we have a dream. We were surprised that dreams really don't have the equity they use to.

Fortunately, we have found enough dreamers and the energy is beginning to mount.

Our pledge to Dr. King is that we will keep trying.

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Author's note: Beginning in 1998-2001 Kids at Hope crisscrossed the country looking for fellow dreamers. Kids at Hope shared a dream "that all children are capable of success, no exceptions!" Kids at Hope had documented during the previous six years the "youth at risk" strategy which was promoted by education, youth organizations, city government, and funding organizations. Kids at Hope believed that such a paradigm was a derogatory stereotype which was morally wrong and was used indiscriminately to promote one's self serving interest. It certainly wasn't ever used to recognize the hope and potential every child offers. Kids at Hope met with national youth organizations, police departments, school districts, city governments, faith based groups and businesses to determine whether such a dream is shared. Over the past two years since our journey began we met 1,000 wonderful managers. We also found a handful of leaders. Enough leaders to keep a dream alive.