

The power in our words

Written by Scott Gray, President/CEO
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Recently, I heard a speaker discuss the power of words; our vocabulary, and the things we tell ourselves about our situation, our future and our potential. This speaker concluded that simply by changing what we said we could change our outcomes.

As we celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. we often reflect on his speeches and the power contained in those words and philosophies that led so many to action for peace.

I believe that every person has a wealth of untapped potential simply waiting to be unleashed. All it takes is a vision for your life and the sincere belief that your dreams, your goals, your vision of personal success can be achieved. Martin Luther King remarked "Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase." Far too many of us fail to take that first step out of fear, but more commonly, we won't take the first step because we're waiting for what we call the 'right place and time.'

The right place and time is now. Taking the first step is always the most difficult. Use the principle of activation-energy to start your gateway to opportunity journey; that is, find the "why" that compels you to take action, and then choose to hold fast to whatever that reason is, because that is the fuel that will motivate you to persist and ultimately achieve your aim.

When our youth begin to proclaim, "I can finish high school and college;" they will. When parents decide, "I am going to fully support the education of my child, and I am going to be a good role model by pursuing lifelong learning as well," they will. When the community collectively chooses to unite to solve its challenges and says "We are going to erase disparity and ensure equal opportunities for all, we will.

Changing our Vocabulary /Speaking it into Reality

Rev. King is a prime example of speaking truth to power as we celebrate the 50th year of that memorable "I Have A Dream" speech. He raised the question of fairness for African Americans, and tirelessly fought for equality, yet he never saw his dream for equality come to fruition. But the lesson here for us all is that he had vision, he remained committed and focused in the face of discouragement, detractors and disbelief. He spoke that vision into reality.

Because of the wide gaps African Americans currently face in education, employment, wealth, and health, there are many reasons to be overwhelmed by what is not happening; so much so, that we still ponder in meetings, reports and committees what has gone wrong. Some of this can be attributed to the absence of transformation on personal levels, and some of our issues are linked to our own self-talk, our lack of changing our own vocabulary. So ask yourself the question, am I speaking possibility or just problems? Am I speaking words of hope or hopelessness? Many of us are doing the same thing that has been holding us back for years. That can be hanging around negative people, having low expectations, setting no goals, making poor choices or blaming others for our own lack of motivation.

When I arrived a little over 3 years ago, with my vision for the Minneapolis Urban League (MUL) was that it would be a Gateway to Opportunity for people color. I couldn't necessarily see where the vision would ultimately take us, but I talked about the vision every day until it started to take

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shape. This vision has led to a transformation of the MUL, which is resulting in tangible results:

We are in discussions to partner with a national entity for the creation of a youth concessions enterprise,

We are growing our workforce programs to place nearly 200 individuals in family supporting jobs,

We are on the verge of turning the MUL's middle/high school academy into a vocational-technical-social enterprise academy,

We are offering new program initiatives that change the delivery of welfare to work and provide demonstrated results, and

We are in discussions to potentially partner with a demolition contractor to create pathways into construction for more workers of color.

While all of these initiatives may not happen, at least we are in the conversation -- we have taken the first step, and we believe in the prospects; even though the staircase is not fully in sight. Three years ago, all of this seemed like a long shot, and now daily, another step on the staircase appears.. giving flight to the MUL vision.

Let's change our words in 2013 and begin realizing more of our dreams. Tell yourself, "I can get that new job." "My child is going to college." "I am going to expand my skill-set." "I am going to buy that home."

Martin Luther King sacrificed his life for your dream, so take it off the shelf and start speaking it to yourself. Find a new friend that wants to see their own vision become a reality and push each other. The MUL welcomes the opportunity to count you as a success story.

Choose to begin earnestly honoring your life, your talents, and your dreams with the words you use, for the power of one can not only transform your life but the world at large.