The worst outbreak of the plague swept through London between 1563 and 1603. Transmitted by fleas living on the fur of rats (not bats), the spread was exacerbated by an overcrowded city in which raw sewage flowed into the Thames River. Over fifty percent of the population contracted the disease and half of them died. At the time, London had the population Baton Rouge does today. The symptoms of the plague included a high fever, swollen lymph nodes, and a bacterial infection that, if spread to the lungs or bloodstream, caused most victims to die within hours.

To try and counteract the spread of the disease, the Crown ordered the complete closure of all theatres in London. At that time, William Shakespeare was working as a playwright at the Rose Theatre. Closures came at the peak of the run of his play, Henry VI. It left him financially destroyed. All of London hunkered down. So, what did Shakespeare do? One of my book publishers, Greenleaf Book Group, gave me the impressive answer in their recent newsletter.

Shakespeare wrote Macbeth and King Lear, two of his most famous and profitable plays.

"When the going gets tough, the tough get going." This oft-quoted line is typically misinterpreted to favor a macho sentiment. The real meaning has little to do with being physically strong and everything to do with being a leader who exemplifies animated optimism. Far from being Pollyannish, it is an expression of a never-say-die resilience, boldly persevering and producing when many around you are timidly wringing their hands. But what exactly does an animated optimist do? Here are my six leadership principles, coupled with inspiration from William Shakespeare:

Create a Masterpiece Every Day. Every single day is a day you invent. Help your associates make it a masterpiece. Masterpieces are outcomes, not processes or activities. I served as a platoon leader in combat in Viet Nam under Captain Jack Hamilton, a man driven to excellence. When I asked him his mission, he would say, "To help ordinary soldiers discover they are warriors when duty calls for their best." Superb leaders coach performance as a greatness enabler, not as an end in itself. Shakespeare wrote in Twelfth Night, "Be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em."

Be a Joy Carrier to Those You Serve. Leaders who are animated optimists are joy carriers, bringing a bold spirit to all they influence. They think positive, assume success, and work with a clear vision of what they want to be, not just what they have to do. Most people are attracted to the light. Optimism
and confidence attract winners and talent more enthused with a search than engulfed by a requirement for security. These are times the spirit leeches among us can rob our hope and enthusiasm. Great leaders are the antidote to gloom and the perpetrator of commitment. In the words of Shakespeare in As You Like It, "I have seen a medicine that's able to breathe life into a stone, quicken a rock, and make you dance canary with spritely fire and motion."

**Assume Complete Accountability for Results.** Leaders who are animated optimists make things happen instead of waiting. GE Healthcare leadership did not wait for FEMA’s permission to start making much-needed generators, they called on their workers to volunteer. One engineer, Tyler Vermey, drove from Salt Lake to Madison, Wisconsin, to help. “I felt like Bruce Willis in ‘Armageddon,’” he said. Animated optimists are achievers who measure success by what gets accomplished not by the quantity of the toil required. They are advocates of trust in the better angels of those they influence. They take full responsibility for the outcome and encourage their associates to assume a stance of “I am the warranty.” Shakespeare said in Julius Caesar, "'It is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves."

**Make a Difference and Success Will Follow.** Leaders who are animated optimists do what they do because they are passionate about it. They are motivated by a clear vision and cherish those around them who share that devotion. When their dream makes a positive difference in the lives of others, it ensures their edge is honed, their sights are kept high, and their zeal remains unstoppable. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was driven by his faith that included a universal philosophy of equality. Animated optimists are always generous and never greedy. They keep score by the contribution made and the rock-solid reputation polished. According to Shakespeare in King Richard II, "The purest treasure mortal times afford Is a spotless reputation…a jewel in a ten-times barr'd-up chest Is a bold spirit in a loyal breast."

**Be Both Doer and Marketer.** Leaders who are animated optimists are ardent promoters of their production. They don't just focus on the excellence of their product, service, or solution—they also market their work. Great works deserve a spotlight and successful people make certain that focus ensures their marketplace is in a position to be influenced by their creations. They are assertive in their pride of accomplishment and are quick to put the attention of recognition on those who made it possible. They nurture great works; celebrate great works, and affirm great workers. William Shakespeare said in Hamlet, "Suit the action to the word, the word to the action…"

**Remain Focused on the Road Ahead.** Clearly, there are valuable lessons to learn from the past. But, leaders who are animated optimists waste little time in laborious post mortems over what might have been. Knocked down, animated optimists get up and charge ahead. Failures are instructions for the future, not subjects for playing "ain't is awful." They are excited about what's around the corner and eager to inspire architects of its unfolding. According to Shakespeare in Julius Caesar, "Cowards die many times before their deaths, the valiant never taste of death but once."

“Here’s what real business leaders do,” wrote John Ellis in an October, 2002 article in Fast Company magazine. “They go out and rally the troops, plant the flag, and make a stand. They confront hostile audiences and the deal with the press. If the issue is confidence, they conduct themselves confidently. If the issue is trust, they make their company’s business transparent. If the issue is character, they tell the truth. They do not shirk responsibility; they assume command. Because a fundamental ingredient of business success is leadership. And, the glandular stuff of leadership is business courage, conviction and character.” Now is the season for animated optimists who contribute joyful productivity and inspired creativity.
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