

Encouragement: The endless echo

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A TIMELY and sincere encouragement is like an oasis in the desert. It quenches our thirst for affirmation and boosts our energy levels. Can we ever do without encouragement in our lives? If the answer is no, how many of us gave a well-deserved word of encouragement recently? Can we recall when we last received words of encouragement from our loved ones or friends? Do we realise that people around us are hungry for encouragement?

Look around us. Our culture is drowning in negativism.

It is so much easier to criticize than to encourage. We hear so much negative and destructive input in our society, at our workplaces and in our social relationships.

These are the thorns that drag us down, that weaken the fabric of humanity. Yes, humanity because no individual lives in isolation. What we think, say, or do has a rippling effect in our society. Because of this, there is a need to encourage one another and to build one another up.

The lack of altruism in the form of encouragement is evident at our workplaces.

A friend once called me up in a very worried tone of voice. Her immediate superior had just called her to see him at his office. She sighed, "No news is good news. If there is a phone call such as this, surely,

something is not quite right." After many years of conditioning, she has learned that "no news means good news".

When there is telephone call from her boss, there is a something wrong.

Silence means everything's fine. Everyone is conditioned to think and behave in a certain way after being treated either negatively or positively on a continuous basis.

What does encouragement mean? Encouragement means to put courage in or to inspire with spirit or hope. Encouragement is a gift that everyone needs and deserves. Encouragement is necessary to build self-esteem in others and to provide continuous reminders of our self-worth.

It is important to look for and find the best in others and to be the powerhouse for people to grow. There is a mirror effect you see; how we treat others will be how others treat us.

Does encouragement cost us anything? It costs us nothing. It only requires a good heart that wishes to sow the seeds of kindness and charity within us.

I can never forget a story told by a woman to a huge congregation of men and women on August 28, 2003 at a Universiti Malaysia Sarawak students' graduation ceremony.

She told us that many years back, she entered King Edward the 7th Medical College at University Malaya in Singapore with the hope of becoming a doctor.

She was admitted to medical school with only biology and mathematics as her matriculation subjects.

The medical programme there was extremely tough. She failed many times in the exams. Many of her peers were asked to leave. She was lucky to be retained in the college. Eventually, she met a tutor who came to her rescue.

With the encouragement of her parents, family members, fellow students, and her tutor, she persevered and eventually in 1955, she became a full-fledged medical doctor.

This woman was none other than Tun Dr Siti Hasmah. Her tutor, who eventually became her husband, is our former Prime Minister.

This is what encouragement can do for others. It can make a discouraged individual pick up the pieces and continue to move on towards the road of excellence.

Encouragement is truly an endless echo.

Tun Dr Siti Hasmah told us in the huge hall filled with aspiring graduates that she could never forget how encouragement had brought her out of her nightmare in medical school.

She shared a touching lesson with us and that was, to be generous with encouragement because encouragement will propel those who received them very far indeed.

The antithesis of encouragement is

discouragement. The absence of encouragement or the lack of it is too costly to repair more often than not.

We must learn to ignore people who try to pull us down with their words or actions.

Know that we can make a choice of whether we are affected by their words of discouragement or not. The choice is in our hands.

A friend of mine sent me a rather comical story about a race among frogs, which illustrated the mechanics of how one could overcome discouragement.

The goal of the race was to reach the top of a high tower. Many people gathered to see and to support the frogs. The race began. In reality, the people did not believe that it was possible that the frogs could reach the top of the tower, and they had these phrases on their lips: "What pain!!! They'll never make it!"

The frogs began to resign, except for one who kept on climbing. The people continued: "... What pain!!! They'll never make it..." At the end, all the frogs quit, except the one, who, with an enormous effort, reached the top of the tower.

Many people were so curious how this frog could withstand all the discouragement it experienced. At the end of the race, the others approached it to ask how it had managed to finish the race—and discovered that it was deaf!

The moral of the story is to be deaf to

someone who tells us "we can't" or "we won't achieve our goals or make our dreams come true" because they steal the aspirations from our hearts. Disregard discouragement such as these.

Martin Buber, a philosopher, describes the power of encouragement this way: "The greatest thing any person can do for another is to confirm the deepest thing in him or her, to take the time and have the discernment to see what's most deeply there, most fully that person, and then confirm it by recognising and encouraging it."

Let us take the time to ponder upon these questions: Who do we need to encourage so that we can build them up in accordance with their needs? Is it a life-partner, a parent, a child, a colleague, a superior, a friend, an acquaintance, or a stranger? Be communicators of hope.

Let us build each other up through words of encouragement because they are endless echoes of hope. And when we are encouraged, do not shrug it off. Listen with our ears, minds and hearts.

Use encouragement wisely to propel us forward so that we can realize our dreams. Encouragement, matters.

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