



Is an Optimist a Fool?

A column by Circle Pines Mayor Dave Bartholomay for the Quad Community Press Newspaper (5/16/2017)

Take a look around. There is a seemingly endless run of stories in the news about the bad shape of our world. Nasty partisan gridlock in St. Paul and in Washington, DC. Rich getting richer and poor getting poorer. Church attendance is down, anger and hate seem to be up, good jobs gone overseas, distrust of our institutions, and a loss of hope for too many of our citizens. And in the midst of all that and more bad news, I am an optimist. Does that make me a fool?

I know a woman from my church who is really struggling. She is fighting a nasty cancer that wants to take her away from her wonderful and loving husband and two teenage boys. Should she just give up? Is it a mistake for her to be optimistic and believe she can beat this disease?

I know a lot of Centennial teachers who are helping kids in their classrooms who are facing difficult life situations. These teachers and staff work very hard to help kids who in all likelihood are going to have a very tough time being 'successful' in modern day America. But they push on day by day, trying again and again to find ways to educate and inspire these kids to beat the odds, to be optimistic about their future. Are they really going to make a difference? Should they just give up and stop caring?

I know a big city Mayor, long retired, who was a fountain of hope and new ideas when he was in office. The other day he confided that, in his old age, as he has seen losses and setbacks, he has become more and more pessimistic about life. Given all he has seen, would he be a fool to be optimistic about the future?

No, absolutely not!

Being an 'optimist' with a positive attitude on life is not about being happy when things are going good and viewed as 'out of touch' when things are going rough. An optimist understands that there will be failures - we don't live in a fantasy land. But we learn from our failures and we believe that success will inevitably follow those failures.

I recently joined the newly formed Roseville Optimists Club that serves the north metro area. Part of their mission is to work each day to make the future brighter by bringing out the best in children, in their communities, and in themselves. I sometimes jokingly refer to the Optimists Club as a 'support group' for when I don't feel quite so positive about the future. I'm also a member of an Optimist Book club with my friend, former Centennial Superintendent Roger Worner. The books we read are so inspiring and the people we meet so wonderful that the monthly meetings can't come soon enough.

So why am I telling you all of this? Because I don't think being optimistic is foolish. In fact, I think it is the only way to a happy, successful and fulfilling life. I imagine a world where we see the positive in situations, where we have hope in resolving tough problems. Where our focus on maintaining a positive attitude shapes the way we see our world and thus increases the possibilities for improving our families and our communities. Where people treating people kindly and with care inspires our youth to take that lesson into a bright future.

Please take a minute and, as the old saying goes, 'count your blessings'. There are more than you think and with an optimistic approach to life you can find many more.