

## Staying Optimistic during a Pandemic

*A column by Circle Pines Mayor Dave Bartholomay for the Quad Community Press Newspaper (March 2, 2021)*

Having an optimistic view of the future is important to your health and to a sense of community. It isn't always easy, and an optimistic attitude can sometimes come and go based upon the situation. But being able to see a more positive view of your future is key to that future happening!

The pandemic has been devastating. There have been 500,000 deaths in the United States – that's half-a-million families who've had their world torn apart. And many more ravaged by the illness have survived, recovering in whole or in pieces. Businesses have been turned upside down; children's education and mental health seriously impacted; the list goes on and on of the damage inflicted by this global pandemic. It is an unprecedented situation that is difficult to navigate through and come out alive and grateful. And like many things in our country, the devastation hasn't been fairly distributed and divides us.

But we all need to find, deep down inside each of us, the ability to face this pandemic with a toughness, with a sense of resolve, with a gritty 'you can knock me down but I'm going to get right back up' attitude. Because in the end, your attitude and mindset will make a difference. Believing in a brighter future helps make that future happen. Consider the Henry Ford quote: "Whether you think you can, or you think you can't – you're right."

The news today is that a big surge in vaccine shots is coming. That's great because there are no easy decisions when vaccine shots are in short supply. Some people want seniors to go first, or educators and staff so schools can safely open up, and yet others want to just open it up to everyone. It can't all happen when the math doesn't work with the number of available shots. Increasing that number will change the whole dynamic! Just imagine if the shots were like we see for the flu – easily available all over the place. Scarcity drives a lot of emotion and anxiety, and finally getting your shot improves your view on the future!

I've been focused this past year on trying to learn more about myself and my community - and how I can make life better for myself and those around me. Are we grateful for our blessings, especially when we see so many people hurting? How well do we care for others, especially those more vulnerable than ourselves? Are we tolerant and supportive of leaders trying to navigate a crisis made extreme because of one simple thing: a lack of enough vaccine? Can each of us use this tragedy to come back better individually and as a member of a family and community?

Having a sense of optimism doesn't mean pretending bad things aren't happening. Instead it means acknowledging that despair and then vowing to push through it day by day, remembering that the sun will indeed come up in the morning, and that how we view the world shapes what happens to us.

In tough times like this there are indeed many dangers, yet there are also opportunities. Let's help ourselves, and our families and friends get through this by being supportive and loving. And let's vow to reflect on how we've each handled things so far, and then promise ourselves that we'll do better in the future.

I know we can do this, that we can rise up to be our best selves in a difficult situation. Spring is just around the corner, and the vaccine supply is growing. It will be a great Minnesota summer and fall!