Wisdom for Navigating Uncertainty

ripples of hope

Paul Wesselmann
for my keepers of hope:
the friends who surround and love me
and the dear ones who live within me
Sometimes we are called upon to be keepers of hope.

Hope for a better tomorrow, hope for a friend who is in despair, hope for a client or loved one who is at risk.

Hope that they will not stumble alone and in the dark.
For all those with whom we connect, the best way we can nurture them is to listen with a heart that is open—and offer hope.

Hope that sustains, hope that nourishes, hope that offers comfort and perhaps healing ...
So hold onto hope today, and if it is too hard for you to do, ask someone, anyone, to hold it for you.

– Nancy Moreau Battaglia
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A few years ago several of my friends were struggling mightily with some really big stuff that was going on in their lives. In my quest to help them regain and retain a sense of hope, I began gathering a collection of useful nuggets of inspiration and information. I reviewed notes from previous talks I had given, scoured
the weekly Ripples emails I sent out, and even dipped into the archives of my social media posts. I gave a few talks on the subject of hope, trying to compile the best of my hopeful content all in one place.

I even toyed with the idea of assembling a book, often twirling around in circles of insecurity, confusion and overwhelm, while
occasionally making some progress toward organizing my thoughts. In the early days of 2020, I made a commitment to publish the content in some form by the end of the year.

Then, something really unexpected happened. We, and I mean the collective we of the entire world, faced an unprecedented, monumental challenge: COVID-19.
What began as troubling news about a highly infectious disease in a faraway land morphed into a worldwide pandemic impacting how we worked and how we lived. We had to physically distance ourselves from each other while struggling with copious amounts of fear, frustration and uncertainty. It was a health-care crisis unlike anything most of us
had ever seen or even imagined.

With the help of my partner and a handful of cherished friends and colleagues, we dived back into the content, ready to unleash the most helpful and most hopeful resource we could assemble in the shortest amount of time.

We hope you find some useful nuggets to raise your spirits today,
and perhaps help you extend ripples of hope to others you know to be struggling.

Peace,

Paul
FOREWORD

By Mary Anne Radmacher

The Ripples Guy

For more than 20 years that is how Paul Wesselmann has been identified. If the thousands of people who have sat in his inspired audiences or read his Monday morning Ripples newsletter had to
collectively give him a new name to go by they’d probably pick, “The Hope Guy.”

Paul’s no stranger to struggle. And he knows the path of hope so well because he’s had to find his way back to hope many times. What that journey did for Paul is an asset to people everywhere. Finding and walking the path of
hope has allowed Paul to become a cartographer of the spirit. A *map maker* showing the roads to hope. Let me illustrate with a story.

Paul’s climbing a hill on one of his almost daily hikes. It’s a steep incline and his pace slows just a little when he notices someone a few slopes lower. The climber, discouraged, has
sat down on a big rock. Tears have turned to heart-wrenching sobs.

Cupping his hands around his mouth, Paul yells, “You. You there! I see you and I hear you. What’s going on?”

Startled, the crying one looks up, takes a deep breath and confesses, “I’m lost. I’m exhausted and I’ve lost all hope of making it up this path.”

Paul yells back, “Oh wow, I’m really
sorry to hear. That sounds awful.” And then pauses a moment before adding, “I have something that might help you. Will you let me share it with you?”

They nod. Still crying.

Paul takes off his backpack and pulls out a well-worn map. It’s been used so many times it’s as soft as a leaf but as strong as well-woven
fabric. He picks up a rock about the size of his fist and gets a length of string out of his pack (yep, he’s usually THAT prepared) wraps the map around the rock, secures it with the string and gently tosses it over the first slope.

It rolls on to the second slope. On the third slope the map rolls right up to their feet.
“Wow!” His aim impresses them. Paul gives them a few minutes to look over the map and then asks, “Would you mind if I traveled to where you are?”

Now that they’ve stopped crying, they nod. Paul makes the distance in just moments.

“Thanks. This map looks ... well, it looks good. It makes me think I
Nodding enthusiastically, Paul affirms, “I know you can. This map has helped me find my way more times than I can tell.” Paul offers to walk part of the way with them and they accept.

This book. This book you are holding in your hand? It’s that map.
Maybe you’re the one who needs some assistance. Or maybe you can share it with someone else who is struggling and needs to know the way to hope.”
Searching for Hope
“In the midst of pain, sorrow, failure, adversity, and despair, it is important to realize that it’s all meant to be overcome. The answers can be found through a handful of perspective, an ounce of confidence, and a pinch of hope.”

– Desi Rotenberg
Over the last 30 years, I’ve crossed paths with quite a few people who were struggling with some really big challenges. Some of them reached out to me in search of support, while others I randomly encountered and offered my help. They often had similar needs and concerns even though the types of difficulty they were facing varied widely: accidents,
loss of a loved one, physical and mental illness, addiction, abuse, serving or living in a war zone, and being a victim of, or witness to, terror.

In addition to being there for others, I’ve faced a few of my own significant challenges, too. Childhood trauma led to severe depression in adolescence and early
adulthood. Several years of feeling hopeless led to multiple attempts at ending my life. I eventually found my way to the light thanks to family, friends, therapy and by developing an array of useful habits and strategies to cultivate physical and emotional well-being.

I’ve learned that we human beings are quite often tougher and more
resilient than we believe we are. We tend to doubt ourselves when we’re depleted, overwhelmed and/or scared. It makes sense that we aren’t as confident when these conditions persist. It’s natural, it’s understandable, and it’s okay as long as we eventually find the courage and strength to make our way back to hope.
I’ve kept track of what was most helpful in my journey, and I’ve asked lots of people what helps them keep afloat during trying times. I make a point to pass along these ideas when I encounter a struggling soul, and I’ve assembled some of the best ideas in this book. I’m excited to share them with you.

Speaking of you ... how are you
doing right now? If things are pretty good overall, looking through this book might give you some ideas on how to help someone you know who is struggling. It also might be useful to note which pieces resonate strongly with you; those will be the pages to turn to the next time you’re feeling stuck or overwhelmed.

If you happen to be grappling
with some big stuff at this point in your life, you may not be feeling 100% today. You may be reading this because you’re in a difficult spot and searching for a solution to a problem. Maybe it’s a health challenge you’re up against. Or maybe you’re witnessing the struggle of a special someone in your life. Perhaps a big change was recently announced
at work or school that’ll affect you, and the unknown future seems unsettling. Maybe it’s a combination of little things that aren’t going the way you intended.

Undoubtedly, there are parts of whatever is going on that seem beyond your control or that don’t have obvious, guaranteed solutions. It’s these very factors that add to the
feeling that this is a hard time!

But I have some news for you—you’ve overcome difficulty before, and every single one of those triumphs over previous challenges is evidence of your ability to deal with hard times. Even if triumph feels like too strong of a word, you almost certainly learned at least one valuable lesson during the
process, and the lesson helped you strengthen your survival muscles.

That’s not to minimize what you’re feeling right now. I feel compassion for the pain, fear, frustration and loneliness that you might be experiencing. I know that you’ll likely be feeling these things, in varying degrees, today, tomorrow and in the weeks ahead. I’m truly
sorry that you’re struggling right now and I’m confident that you can get through this, because I believe in you.


You made it to today.

So, take what you can use from this book. Some of these ideas may need to be adapted, tweaked and/
or translated to be useful. Pieces of this might need to be set aside for another time and some parts you may want to just ignore completely. My hope is that at least some of what is assembled here will make this difficult time more manageable while reminding you that you’re not alone on the journey.
Preparing for Hope
“Hope itself is like a star—not to be seen in the sunshine of prosperity, and only to be discovered in the night of adversity.”

– Charles Haddon Spurgeon
When it feels like the world is closing in on us, we often feel we lack control over lots of things that happen around or to us. And while we may not be able to control everything that is happening in our world, we do have some measure of control over how we respond to things that happen in the world, and especially to things that happen to us.
One of the most important first choices that you’ll need to make is whether you want to react from a place of fear or respond from a place of hope.

**Fear is often a subconscious reaction while hope is a conscious response.**
When you’re in crisis—whenever the world, your life or the moment feels hopeless—remember your A, B, C’s:
A = Assess
B = Breathe
C = Connect
A = ASSESS

Quickly assess the situation. Are you in imminent danger right now, physically or emotionally? If so, safety is critical: Call 911 or take another immediate action to protect your well-being and your life.
If you’re not in critical danger, make time to take stock of what you have working for you—list your assets (friends, colleagues, money saved for a rainy day, your pets or plants, your health).

**Identify the good things in your life and how they might be able to help you in this situation.**
This assessment can help you recognize that you have a lot more going for you than you initially realized.
B = BREATHE

*Take a deep breath.* Take another breath, thinking the word ‘here’ as you inhale and then thinking the word ‘now’ as you exhale.

Repeat this a few times, gradually taking slower and deeper breaths.
Breathe in
"Here."
Breathe out
"Now."
Feel your belly rise as you inhale more deeply. Feel it lower as you exhale. Do this at least 3 times, and maybe a dozen if necessary.

Controlling our breath allows us to be more present, more aware and provides a gentle reminder that we have some control of our life, even if it’s less control than we’d like.


**C = CONNECT**

*Without connection, we feel alone.*

And when we feel alone, it’s hard to find and feel hope. That connection can be to a person, a higher power, our beautiful planet or your inner self.

The goal here is to connect with someone or something who can support you. If someone doesn’t
automatically pop into your mind, reach for connection in other ways that will bring you strength and remind you that you have access to more power than you think. Here are four tips—I call the four Reaches—for finding the right connection when you need it most.
tip #1 Reach OUT
Think of a friend, a family member, a neighbor or a colleague that you can talk to in person, via text message, or by phone and bravely say to that person,

I need your help, please.
Or, maybe send them a message that says,

I'm having a hard time right now. Can you share a motivational song or video that lifts you up when you're struggling?
tip #2

Reach UP
Sometimes it’s useful to \textit{reach UP} to a higher source that you believe in: a higher power, God, the universe, consciousness, source of light—whatever works for you. Say a prayer you know the words to, pause for a few minutes of meditation, recite a poem or verse that speaks to you or just talk to that higher source and ask for insight, guidance, support,
a sign, etc. Sometimes the act of meditating or praying is enough to restore a momentary sense of calm or control in your life. Then be on the lookout for the help you requested because it may come in a form you didn’t necessarily expect.
tip #3 Reach DOWN
Try grounding yourself by *reaching DOWN* and connecting with the earth: literally put your hand on the ground, sit with both feet flat on the floor, walk barefoot on the grass or sand, or touch a plant or tree.
You’re part of our big, beautiful planet. Physically connecting with the earth can remind you that you’re part of something larger.
Another way to reach DOWN is to hold or touch a special object that brings you a sense of joy: a special stone you found on a walk, a stuffed animal, a favorite blanket, a necklace or treasured memento.
tip #4 Reach IN
Remember that you’ve made it through tough times before so reach IN and see if you can access the part of you that knows you can get through this. Remind yourself that you’ve handled difficulty, even survived stuff that you initially didn’t know whether you really could deal with at the time.
Another way to reach IN is to imagine what you might say to a close friend who’s dealing with a similar challenge, and then say those very same things to yourself. You may even try writing that message down in a letter or email to send to yourself.

Stressful times are hard, and sometimes feeling overwhelmed
makes you feel like you’re
overdrawn, overextended or just
plain over it. Just remember, if
you use your A, B, C’s and the four
Reaches, you have a lot more power
than you may think you have. Give
these tips a try next time you’re
feeling like you need to find some
sparks of hope.
Reflect

I use the four Reaches when I need to remember who I am and that I’m connected to this great big beautiful world of ours. Make your own list of who you’ll reach out to,
which ways you can connect with a higher power, where you’ll rediscover your relationship with the earth and how you best connect with yourself.
3

Imagining Hope
“Hope is like a road in the country; there wasn’t even a road, but when many people walk on it, the road comes into existence.”

– Lin Yutang
Imagining hope—our capacity to remember what hope can provide in times of difficulty—doesn’t mean we have all the information we need to resolve the current troubles we’re facing. Getting a glimpse of the benefits hope brings can remind us that we don’t need all the answers right now AND that we can reasonably expect some good
things to happen when hope returns. Imagining hope allows us to keep breathing and to keep moving so we can make our way toward the light of a brighter day, when our reserves of hope will be replenished.

It’s easier to summon the power of hope when you remember these helpful qualities of hope:
HOPE ACTIVATES

It wakes us up to the realization that we’re not victims of the current situation, and that we can take an active part in moving forward out of the darkness and into the light.
HOPE TRANSFORMS

It improves our outlook by reorganizing our thoughts and emotions, by shifting our perspective and bolstering our confidence.
HOPE EMBOLDENS

It lifts our mood which then paves the way for our courage to grow stronger so that we can take those life-affirming actions.
HOPE INVITES

It helps us to believe that better days, brighter circumstances and solutions to our current problems are headed our way.
HOPE ATTRACTS

It’s a magnetic light that attracts more light—it is the opposite of despair that is mired in darkness.
HOPE INSTRUCTS

It teaches us by asking us to consider new ways and offering alternative solutions.
HOPE SHINES

It leads us to clarity of thought, confidence of action, courage of heart and commitment to believing in a better tomorrow.
HOPE EXPANDS

It grows and expands and spreads when we focus our thoughts on it.
HOPE DARES

It risks not knowing the exact outcome of an action, while having faith that a better day is coming, and moving one step closer to that better day right now.
HOPE BELIEVES

It’s confident there’s still good in the world and good in our lives even in the face of current challenges.
HOPE REFRESHES

It allows us to think in a new way, informed by the successful experiences of others that we’ve witnessed or heard about—it’s not insubstantial wishful thinking.
HOPE PERSISTS

It’s hardy and persistent through all seasons and at every stage of this human life—when we’re hopeless it’s likely us who moved away from hope because we got distracted by the circumstances on our path.
Reflect

These are some of the qualities I have identified as living inside hope. Which ones speak to you? Think of 4–5 other qualities that I may have missed and add them to this list.
Paving a Path for Hope
“Hope is not something you can just place in your back pocket or put your fingers around—it’s the belief in a world that has yet to exist.”

– Jonathan Mark Foreman
When faced with a crisis—a time of considerable instability—we can try looking at it as a chance to learn about ourselves and how the world works. Think of it as an opportunity to use the skills you’ve gained from facing previous difficulties. Stretch the possibilities and see this as a sacred opportunity for you to heal and grow as a person.
How you see the situation, and how you choose to respond to it, will make a huge difference. I encourage you to choose hope.
YOU MATTER

You may be too overwhelmed right now to recognize it, but let me remind you that your contributions are likely more precious and more valuable than you have the energy to realize right now. There are people you’d never even guess whose lives are positively impacted by you. People in your neighborhood, at the
library, where you shop regularly, at the office or job site, at school, the local restaurant, the gym ... you have a circle of influence you may not be able to fathom right now.
YOU’RE A SURVIVOR

Let me remind you of one major reason to be hopeful right now:

You are here.
You made it to today.

The not-so-small fact that you’re still living and breathing (and reading this!) means that your survival rate in dealing with all
previous challenges is 100%.

You may be exasperated and exhausted because it feels like you’ve had to deal with TOO MUCH STUFF in this lifetime, but the truth is: you’ve survived it all.

Every challenge you’ve faced has helped you become stronger and wiser. The minor difficulties and inconveniences you’ve gotten
through have helped you learn to solve problems and deal with conflict. The bigger challenges have strengthened your courage and persistence muscles. You’ve learned about yourself and hopefully recognized you have new skills for future challenges.
FIND COURAGE

What I’ve learned, and what lots of other people have told me they’ve learned from their experiences, is that the bigger the challenge was that they overcame, the greater their gains in courage, strength and wisdom. It seems that when we realize we’ve survived yet another series of setbacks, we feel wiser,
more capable and more confident because we’ve done something that has forever made us stronger and more able to deal with life on life’s terms.
TAKE ACTION

You’ve likely heard the saying: With great risk comes great reward. Yes, I know that making a choice to take action right now might feel risky, but taking action in the face of the yucky-ness will give you some sense of control.

Ironically, the worse things are right now, the more potential there
is for healing and growth. It may seem like a stretch to take action when hope is in short supply; this is when small steps forward can help build momentum.
LOOK FOR SMALL VICTORIES

Hope is most needed at the precise moment when it’s the hardest to muster. Even the smallest amount of hope generates sparks of energy that can help you in the short term. It’s possible that fear and frustrations are running so high that hope seems in short supply. Gaining just a little bit of hope won’t completely douse
fear or frustration, but it can light the way to more constructive ways of thinking and acting.

Look for the small things that you’re willing to believe in this very moment so you can deal with this major hurdle. Even if you’re only barely convinced of a solution, and even if the hopefulness is short-lived, glimmers of hope have a cumulative effect.
REMEMBER YOUR TRIUMPHS

You’ve faced tough times before and you’ve overcome them—and you can do it again. Remembering these past triumphs and building on them reminds you of the strength and knowledge you have to keep going and
find new options to help improve your situation.

Ask yourself these questions:

★ **What worked for you in the past to rise up to previous challenges?**

★ **Who did you speak to?**

★ **What resources did you use?**

★ **What did you do?**
The answers to these questions will remind you of the tools you already have in your toolbox. Remember that FEAR can stand for “Forget Everything And Run” or “Face Everything And Rise.” Your answers to the questions above will help your mind come back into the present moment where you can act and deflate fear.
Hope grows when we remember that we really DO have a purpose for being here. That maybe, just maybe, these current struggles are part of a much bigger plan that’ll help us (somehow!) make a positive difference in the world simply by getting to what lies ahead.
Whatever your current belief system around God, a higher power, or the energy of the universe, your presence on the planet isn’t a complete coincidence. Most of us believe there are good reasons we’re here on this earth, even if we haven’t yet discovered all of them.
R. Buckminster Fuller said, “Never forget that if there weren’t any need for you in all your uniqueness to be on this earth, you wouldn’t be here in the first place.” The ‘you’ that Bucky Fuller was talking about—well that includes you, too!
Reflect

Look back on a recent struggle or conflict you recently successfully overcame. Did you use any of these strategies to help you through this situation? Did you use others?
Now think of a time when you were feeling unsuccessful or overwhelmed? Imagine how you might have applied one of these strategies to help you through that hard time? Create a list of each of the struggles and think of 1 or 2 ways in which you have used each strategy. Keep it handy and pull it out when you need to pave the path for hope.
Finding Hope's Helpers
“Hope is the destination that we seek.

Love is the road that leads to hope.

Courage is the motor that drives us.”

– Dean Koontz
Sometimes, hope doesn’t appear right when we need it.

When hope is in short supply, it sometimes helps to rely on her helpers to rally us and ignite sparks to stoke the hope fire. These helpers, added in the right combination depending on the situation, can enhance and enlarge our hope.
When you need to find additional strength, seek out hope’s helpers to give you an extra lift. Let me introduce you.
STILLNESS

Stillness is a feeling of peace in our hearts that exists even when the world around us feels chaotic. As we refine our ability to relax we create an internal environment that’s more hospitable to hopeful feelings. Creating space for stillness and time to invite calm and its peace into our lives helps us sustain hope.
Compassion is a more gentle reaction to suffering that elicits a desire to help. Harsh judgment of people and places is toxic to our hopefulness. Compassion toward ourselves and toward others helps us remember that there IS good in the world; that WE can be the goodness. I believe compassion attracts more goodness.
Persistence is a form of strength that allows us to keep working toward a goal even when we face delays, distractions or destruction that might make us think that giving up is the easier option. Just like building physical strength by lifting weights or hiking mountains, persistence grows stronger with practice.
DETERMINATION

Determination is a first cousin of persistence. It’s a mindset that fuels our ability to keep moving even when life tries to mire us in the muck. It’s the ability to keep trudging, one slow step after the other, down the road toward a happy destiny.
FAITH

Faith is the act of believing when there isn’t definitive proof available—either because we can’t access it or it simply doesn’t exist. Having faith in our ability to rise up or in something larger than ourselves (a higher power, consciousness, community, etc.) helps us stay afloat when we’ve drifted away from hope’s shores.
Optimism is the ability to see the upside of situations. The people and situations we encounter in life almost always have both light and dark in them; both good and bad aspects. We can’t ignore the dark totally but we can choose to see the light clearly. Developing a grounded, realistic optimism allows you to see the good
stuff without ignoring the bad stuff that may lead to danger or harm.
If you’re scared of the dark, the quickest way to feel better is to turn on the light. Finding a way to lighten your mood with humor, something that makes you smile or maybe even laugh can serve as a mini-break, a recess during a long day of learning. Develop a sense of humor if you’re lacking in this area—some serious
thinkers don’t even realize they’re caught in a rut—because a sense of humor is one more useful tool in your toolbox.
Reflect

I invite you to think about which of these actions brings you hope. Which do you choose today? Which one do you want to nurture?
Once you have determined which actions you want to develop, spend some time nurturing those qualities and exploring some of the others to see if you can expand your list of hope’s helpers.
Recognizing Hope’s Companions
“Hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: you don’t give up.”

– Anne Lamott
In addition to hope’s many helpers, there are also some other emotions that seem incompatible with hope. I like to think of these “other” emotions as useful companions that, when handled properly, help hope do its thing.
Difficulty may not sound like a friend—who doesn’t want the easier, softer way through? We’d all prefer to simply feel safe all the time. Yet
it’s difficulty that offers us a chance to put our survival skills to work. Difficulty, often in hindsight, teaches us while it strengthens us. Just like free weights need to be heavy enough to help the muscles in our body become stronger, life has to be hard enough to help strengthen our survival spirit.
FRUSTRATION

Frustration is a warning sign that we’re unhappy and uncomfortable with where we are and with what’s going on around us. It’s a sign that we feel STUCK in some way. Yet a sense of frustration can be helpful IF we recognize and respond to it quickly and get into action again. A word of caution: eventually
frustration can lead to rage or fury so it’s wise to recognize frustration when it’s happening. It’s like an early warning device.
Anger, in the right amount, fuels action. Remember though that too much anger can burn—both us and others. I have a color code for the destructive and the helpful kinds of anger: Red is for rage that burns destructively because
it flares up and out of control. Blue is for fury that throws a flame like a blowtorch: if handled with caution it has the potential to be constructive and weld things together.

Be aware of the color of your anger. It’s important that you find a way to recognize which anger you’re experiencing and then channel it in as helpful a way as possible.
Fear can be a trusted friend that warns us that danger may lie ahead; its presence allows us to sharpen our senses. The key is recognizing the difference between healthy fear and an obsessive, repetitive fear that has no intention of helping us but wants us to stay stuck in the muck instead. I like to declare:
“I’m aware of you, Mr. Fear. I recognize you and acknowledge you, but I don’t bow to you, nor will I be limited by you. State your business and be on your way because I have magnificent things to accomplish!”
DENIAL

Living in denial, refusing to see and acknowledge the actual state of life around us prevents us from facing the truth and taking action to deal with it in a positive way. Maybe the only thing useful about denial, if we don’t stay in it too long, is that it allows us to more gradually accept a difficult reality.
GRIEF

Grieving is necessary, useful and healthy even though it’s also painful. Grief is one of those friends that we may dread seeing on our doorstep but who turns out to be the one who walks hand in hand with us through some of the bumpiest parts of our journey. Losing a person or situation that’s been important to us shifts
saying goodbye from being a single event to a longer process of letting go.
It isn’t fun to feel let down, to be bummed that something didn’t turn out the way we wanted, to have someone we trust do something (or fail to do something) that leaves us feeling abandoned. Still, disappointment can be a mirror that invites us to reflect on the expectations we have of ourselves,
of others, and of situations. Disappointment can point us toward our hopes. We can use what our disappointment teaches us to ponder whether we had reasonable, hopeful expectations to begin with or if it’s time to consider an alternative approach to getting what we want or need.
Reflect

Next time you’re feeling one of these emotions, try to stop and think about how you might be able to pivot to a more hopeful place. Listen to
what it's trying to tell you and heed its message so that you can respond from a place of hope instead of reacting from a place of fear.
Activating Hope
“If you fall off a bike and get back up, you are no longer the person who fell—you are the person who is still riding.”

– Marie Forleo
Hope is a verb—so we sometimes need to get moving so hope can get moving, too. Just like we can get ready for a job interview, prepare for a visit from loved ones, or train for a triathlon, there are things we can do to help make hope more likely to grow in us and in our lives.

We can learn to embrace uncertainty, or at least try to get
more comfortable with not knowing how it’s all going to work out. The unknown is scary and yet essential. The only way to accomplish things we haven’t yet done is to do things we haven’t yet tried. The less certainty we have about what’s going to happen, the more trepidation we’re likely to have. Scooting farther away from our comfort zone and
into our challenge zone is one way to embrace uncertainty. We’re taking an action while we’re also waiting to see how it all pans out.

Here are some actions you can take when you need to put hope into play.
Avoid destination thinking—that is, avoid thinking that if or when circumstances are different that only THEN you’ll be happy. When we think we were happier “back then” or that we’ll be happier “when we get that raise or lose 10 pounds,” then we totally miss the reality, and the often joyful messiness, of being alive.
Yes, our past offers some valuable history lessons worth keeping in mind, and we need to keep our eye on what’s coming up in our lives. Yes, today may be a really tough day, and today is the day we have.
SEEK SUPPORT

Like the moon helps the ocean tides on earth move in and out, we also need to seek support outside of ourselves to help us stay in the flow. Check your tides—if you’re at low tide, reach out to those who consistently lift you up. Arrange for a lunch date, a hug or at least exchange a few brief messages.
When you find yourself at high tide, remember to reach out to someone else and be their “moon” and help their tide come back in, too.
It isn’t always easy to open our hearts to develop an authentic connection with someone. Maybe our personality prefers to keep emotions and connections at arm’s length. Maybe the traditions of our families, communities or cultures have dictated how close we get to those around us. Past hurts
sometimes create protective coatings to safeguard us from future hurts, but that protective shield also may keep away the people who want to love us.

Take the time to notice both the benefits and costs of keeping people at a distance, and see if there aren’t some small risks that you could take to let someone get a little closer.
Then you can reassess just where you want to draw your boundary lines.
Sometimes we need to shake off everything that’s familiar to our eyes and ears so that we can look at life from a different angle. A fresh perspective may show us the problem isn’t as big or deep as we thought it was. A fresh perspective might offer a solution we simply couldn’t see from that situation or
place where we thought we were so comfortable.

Perhaps you can read some authors you’ve not read previously for a new take on certain problems. Or maybe you can seek counsel from a different source than you usually turn to for help. Even just changing our routines a bit and maybe taking your daily walk in the morning
instead of the evening may jog you out of a sense of hopelessness. Try new things and find what helps.
GO LONG

Remember to take the long view. The short view, seeing only what’s happening right now and the short-term impact, can be a source of panic. The long view reminds us that stock market crashes recover, flooded communities get rebuilt and new strategies get developed when old ways stop working.
Every day we’re building a ladder that helps us climb to the heights of success we want to achieve. The joyful days encourage us and make it easier to climb. The difficult days strengthen our resolve and make us more determined. And the regular days let us practice consistency to keep putting one foot on the next rung as we steadily climb up, up, up
toward our highest dreams, goals and best selves.

Today is here. Climb if you can, rest if you need to, and enjoy the view wherever you are.
Letting go of what’s over in your life is frequently easier said than done. I’ve found it useful to borrow some of the traditions and rituals we’re familiar with to help say goodbye and move on.

For example, consider what it might be like to imagine planning a graduation ceremony or a retirement...
party for the way things used to be or the way you wish things would have turned out. Maybe a memorial service for the plans you had that didn’t reach fruition will help you let go and begin again with a fresh perspective and renewed hope.
BE GENTLE

When people are hurting, we often take care to be extra gentle with them—we also need to be gentle with ourselves. If you’re struggling, it’s OK to cut yourself a little slack. You don’t need to solve all your problems at once to be happy and you don’t have to be perfect to be loved.
When you’re hurting or feeling lost, treat yourself as you’d treat a friend who’s hurting. Send some loving kindness to yourself with a healthy dose of forgiveness wrapped around a hug filled with patience.
Reflect

It’s OK if you can’t do all of these (or any of these) things. Cut yourself some slack and see if you can just experiment a little: sample a few of these approaches to see if they make
it easier for even a little bit of hope to appear. The important thing is to KEEP TRYING so you can eventually find a few things that work for you.
Cultivating Hope
“The very least you can do in your life is figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance, but live right in it, under its roof.”

– Barbara Kingsolver
Think of hope as a healthy *houseplant*—it takes cultivation for hope to continue and grow: monitoring, watering, fertilizing and occasional repotting into a bigger container when roots outgrow their space.
Cultivating hope begins by concentrating on The Six C’s: clarity, courage, commitment, connection, curiosity and calm. They are a rich soil in which hope can grow.
Clarity
Clarity helps us distinguish between authentic hope and wishful thinking. Clarity moves us away from giving in to short-term satisfaction and the temporary comfort we think that immediate gratification will provide. Clarity encourages us instead to stay the course and to keep working toward long-term success.
Honing the skills of making a realistic, unflinching assessment of the way things are, and then to having a clear vision of where they could be under different circumstances, are the keys to practicing clarity.

This process can be challenging because we’re forced to look at our own part in how we got to
where we are now. Sure there were circumstances that we didn’t have power over but what choices did you make that you could make differently next time?

The more we practice this process and see our own patterns and habits, the more we are able to make better choices going forward. The more likely we are to take the steps that
WILL help us reach our goals even as life continues throwing us various situations to overcome.
2 Courage
Fear may be what we feel, but *courage is what we can do*. We can cultivate our capacity to move forward despite being afraid. When we’re knee-deep in fear is when we need skills to be able to push forward.

Being brave, being courageous, is seeing, smelling and tasting the fear, and still standing firm in our resolve to keep moving forward.
Commitment
Making a firm decision about what we’re willing to do, where we’re willing to go, and what we’re not willing to accept is what commitment is all about. There’s a saying floating around social media these days that says:
“Commitment means staying loyal to what you said you were going to do long after the mood you said it in has left you.”
It’s a great reminder that our moods WILL change and that we can stay firm in our commitment to what matters most to us, and to what protects us, through all of those shifting moods. Doing this may require feeling some discomfort in the moment, but remembering our long-term goals inspire us to press on.
4 Connection
Never underestimate the power of loneliness to drive away our hope. Loneliness, that feeling of being disconnected from others, is the enemy.

**Strengthening our connections to others helps hope grow.**

When we’re struggling to deal with a particular challenge, or multiple
challenges, turning our attention toward someone else may sound counterintuitive, but there’s power in taking this action. The simple act of opening our heart to another human gets us off the hamster wheel of self-focused thinking that’s holding our brain hostage.

Whether it’s connecting with a seldom-seen family member, an
estranged friend (maybe a friend who is strange?), or a coworker we only know in the workplace, our human hearts are reminded that we’re not alone when we reach out to others. We even have a chance to put aside our own concerns for a moment and ask how they’re doing.
5 Curiosity
Curiosity helps engage our minds in useful ways. Curiosity can disarm fear and doubt’s abilities to overwhelm our system. But it’s a natural, and tempting, human response to spend lots of time in judgment when we’re afraid and uncomfortable. We judge other people, we judge ourselves, and our tendency is to quickly give someone
a thumbs up or thumbs down, and then look for evidence to support our judgment. Part of this process is what we naturally do to determine if situations or people are safe or dangerous. It’s when we’re in a funk that our determinations can run to the negative side and turn into judgments.

When possible, it’s helpful to
replace judgment with curiosity. Getting curious enough to ask ourselves, “Why is someone choosing to say or do that? What’s their motivation or goal? Are they coming from a place of fear and/or discomfort?”

When we get curious instead of judgmental we give ourselves a sense of control over the situation. We
can decide if we want to participate or walk away. We can decide if we believe what we’re being told or know the facts to be otherwise.
6 Calm
Calmness feels like being balanced and steady. Yet it’s so easy to get worked up, especially when things are genuinely awful. It’s natural and even healthy to have lots of ARGH, GRRRRR and OH, NO moments. The sooner we can return to a more centered place, however, the more likely we’ll be to engage our heads
and hearts in ways that are helpful and healing and hopeful.
Reflect

Identify which of the Six C’s you already rely on and appreciate their benefits. What would it take to make an extra effort to explore one or two of the others? Are there other C’s that might be worth adding to the list?
Sustaining Hope
“In every moment of hope, I free myself.”
– Deepak Chopra
In the past eight chapters we’ve unpacked many different approaches and strategies to make it easier for hope to appear. We wanted to wrap up this exploration of hope with a tool kit designed to make it easier for hope to stick around and possibly grow even deeper roots so hope is more consistently available, in good times and bad.
These are my go-to-actions that I refer to as my “conquer kit” because they consistently help me conquer barriers to hope.
COLLECT UPLIFTING QUOTES

Gather sayings, poems, passages and/or lyrics that soothe and/or invigorate your soul. Keep them in a handy journal or on your phone to read regularly.
TAKE IN MOTIVATING MEDIA

Watch movies, TV shows or other programs. Read books and listen to podcasts that encourage and inspire you.
PRACTICE TAKING ACTION

Walk outside, brew and drink tea, meditate, work on a puzzle, dance, paint, hang out with trusted friends, share a meal or rest. Do the things that you love and bring you joy.
LISTEN TO PLAYFUL PLAYLISTS

Tune in to a song—or create a playlist of songs—that reliably shifts you into a higher gear. Include music that makes you want to get up and dance or go for a brisk walk or run.
LOOK AT JOYFUL IMAGES

Create an online photo album with images of peak experiences and happy times so that with just the tap of a few buttons you can relive the experiences captured in the photos.
IDENTIFY HEROES

Know the people important to you who exemplify admirable attributes whether they’re fictional characters, historical figures, cultural icons or simply other “everyday” people you know.
SELECT SUPERSTAR SUPPORTERS

Create a circle of people who are consistently available to share your joys as well as your challenges. Keep in touch with them regularly to develop connections that hold through good times and bad.
MAKE A LIST OF REASONS TO HANG TOUGH

Develop a list of people and activities that are important to you. Remember that time spent with these important people and participating in these activities are better for everyone involved when you bring your best self.
LIVING PROOF OF PERSISTENCE

Write down the details of specific experiences you’ve had that at first seemed scary or tragic and that you found your way through. You may even think of these as “survival” situations in your life. Recording your survival skills in detail gives you concrete proof of the power of your persistence!
IDENTIFY BEACONS

Create a list of people that have triumphed over considerable difficulty. Consider cancer survivors, war heroes, unemployed folks who leaped into whole new careers, people who’ve overcome addiction, someone who rose to great heights of success out of poverty, etc. And be sure to include
the everyday heroes who may even shine brighter in your life: single parents raising kids without any help, the elderly neighbor who lost their spouse and now delivers meals to others, the foster child who’s on the Dean’s List in high school.
Reflect

I use this Conquer Kit whenever I need a little dose of hope. Which ones would you like to consider collecting? Ponder some of the things in your life that help you create hope to customize your own Conquer Kit.
CONCLUSION

“You don’t need to remain hopeful for a whole month, or even a whole day ... just long enough to take a few breaths inward and a few steps forward.”

- Paul Wesselmann
We did it! If you’re reading this conclusion, a few remarkable things have happened, it means a few of us successfully assembled some thoughts and ideas about hope into something for you to read; it also means that you have actively participated by reviewing these thoughts and ideas. That means we are almost finished with this book.
Almost.

Before we celebrate and wrap all this up, we need to figure out which of these ideas are worth implementing into your life. These strategies and perspectives won’t do much good just living here inside this book ... they need to be infused
into your thoughts and feelings and everyday actions.

One of the easiest ways to accomplish this is to glance back through the book and jot down a few things that really jumped out as easy, interesting and/or compelling. Then put that list somewhere you can occasionally review, edit and most importantly: use!
Another helpful, hopeful way to make sure this book has the biggest possible impact is for you to extend the ripples of hope by sharing a few ideas with others in your life when they need a lift.

The poem at the very beginning of this book opened with “Sometimes we are called upon to be keepers of hope,” reminding us that we each
encounter opportunities to be the ripples of hope others can rely on when they are struggling. And just as we extend our hands and our hearts to weary souls, there are others out there waiting to help us, too.

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was flush with hope—I spent time every day sharing upbeat
messages, recording mini-pep talks, and distributing stickers that said, “We Got This!” After a few weeks, though, I began to falter; struggling to maintain my pace and my attitude as the news remained grim and the impact of the pandemic on my work and life began to sink in.

But a curious thing happened just as I began to lose hope; messages
started arriving from folks who told me just how much the ideas I was sharing meant to them and their friends and colleagues. That bolstered my hope, allowing me to feel validated: the effort I had been extending was really making a difference.

In the midst of those rough days and weeks, I learned again how to
lean on friends and colleagues, and how to recognize and honor my own limits. I was reminded over and over that the world is filled with countless Keepers of Hope. Some days I’m called to be one, while other days I needed to rely on my support network. In a few sacred moments, it was an extraordinary gift to be both.

I know the ideas in this book
cannot repair everything that has been broken, replace what has been lost and erase the truly awful things that unfortunately exist in our world. I also know they don’t need to. If they can unleash even a few small helpful, hopeful ripples in your direction, they might be able to lift you up a bit. And then you can pass along a little something else to
someone you know who is struggling ... and small ripples of hope will continue expanding ever outward, on and on, helping countless souls who will benefit from innumerable Keepers of Hope.

The end (but not really).

Peace,

Paul
These pages are too teensy and my mind is too swirly to include all the kind souls who helped unleash *Ripples of Hope*. Still...

Em affirmed there was more than one book simmering within me; Hhundt & Hammie cheered me on from the first *Ripples of Hope* pep talk to a final manuscript, and DC contributed constructive connections and concepts.

Encouragement poured in from Coco, KT, Lanie, TC, Tootsie, Wilson and my favorite FoF; my Bubbas all love me fiercely, even the ones who rarely smile or hug.
Who pitched in with revisions both early and late? PATTY! Jamie’s editing is simply delicious (just like his cakes and cookies); Clare brought her usual flair to ensure this book is a beauty.

Finally, a shout out to the fascinating and remarkable Tootie Wesselmann (1930-2020), and to my sisters who took exceptionally good care of our mom during her final years.
ONE MORE THING …
YOU CAN SUPPORT HOPE

If you purchased this digital book through the Ripples store—thank you! If someone passed you a copy, please consider supporting the author, designer, editors and all the effort it took to make this happen by visiting www.ripplehope.com to contribute.

Thanks for helping us unleash ripples of hope.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Wesselmann is a writer, educator, and speaker with a passion for empowering and uplifting others by unleashing ripples of positivity and growth. Paul holds degrees in psychology and higher education and has spent more than two decades traveling around North America as a leadership trainer and keynote speaker. His newsletter, Ripples, is read by more than 30,000 subscribers every Monday morning, and by many more who follow @RipplesGuy on just about every social media platform. Paul lives in Cincinnati, Ohio, visits the Colorado Rockies frequently, and believes that effective living includes proper amounts of meditation, exercise, rest and angel food cake.
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The End