

MONDAY MESSAGE

FROM DR. MCFARLAND



Are you a Possibilitarian?

March 5, 2018

I was recently at a conference and asked by a colleague to define the secrets to achieving success. Specifically, he wanted to know what it takes to move from mediocre to success and how long should it take. I interpreted his questions to mean that he, like many others, was looking for a shortcut to success. I believe that many people want the glory, but have little patience for the story.

In my life, I have found that there is no such thing as an overnight success. Success is the result of daily choices and intentional sacrifices we make to maintain the right attitude, to act in accordance with our beliefs and to persevere through adversity.

I have studied exceptional people and have come to realize that the circumstances they face during their journey are often similar or worse than what others have faced. However, the difference is the exceptional people choose to succeed even when external circumstances make success appear impossible.

Exceptional people adopt an attitude that focuses on the possibilities around them. Some researchers label these types of people as “Possibilitarians.” Research has found that looking for possibilities is an attitude before it becomes a skill and forces you to be selective about the information you accept and reject.



Credit: Associated Press

In the 1950s, the research was clear, and there was enough evidence to support, that a human could not run a mile in under four minutes. Doctors and scientists said the human body could not possibly achieve such a feat, and some suggested the body would break down before such a speed could be reached.

Rodger Bannister (left), who was a medical student at the time, was a possibilitarian who possessed an unwavering belief in himself and strong work ethic. In 1954, he set a new record and broke the impossible four-minute mile barrier. Soon, other runners followed suit and ran the mile in under four minutes as well. Today, even high school students are running the mile in under four minutes.

As I think about our work in education, and specifically in Crowley ISD, my “four-minute mile” is proving that our students can achieve at high levels. I desire to debunk the myth that closing the achievement gap is impossible. I reject the notion and commonly held belief that poverty, race, a parent’s education level or a student’s zip code is a proxy for poor student performance. It does not have to be this way. Not on my watch!

I am a possibilitarian.

I know that when educators work with intention to ensure that high-quality instruction is occurring inside the classroom, students are engaged in meaningful work. When the adults within the building and district own the outcomes, we can consistently close the achievement gap.

I am a possibilitarian because I understand that it only takes one interaction to change a life. One word spoken at the right time, and with the right attitude, can change a student’s future or destroy it. One gesture can let a student know you care and change their future.

We all can think of educators who, because they decided to do more than what was required, helped us to see our possibilities. My request to each of you today is to look for possibilities and identify potential within our students. I challenge you to find the possibilities and reasons to celebrate. Realize that you are here for a purpose and that we are serious about the work of serving our students in a significant way.



With something to think about, I am Dr. Mike McFarland, recognizing that success will not come overnight, but it is possible when we become possibilitarians and work with intention.

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