

Great Leaders Know How to Flip the Script

The 1950s was the decade of transformation for our country.

One transformer was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He preached, lived and taught equality, freedom and opportunity. In no other country or society is this aspiration able to be realized as in this nation. But Dr. King's holy dissatisfaction with the status quo made him a forerunner of not just Black Americans, but every American. His life contained an unrestrained passion for the unhinged potential that lies within every individual. Dr. King didn't take No as Never, Not Now as Yes It's Time. He embodied the verse from the New Testament which admonishes readers, "that faith without works is dead."

On this Monday, January 17th, we honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s indefatigable passion for the possible, and for the dream that a life is never something lost that isn't celebrated. King was able to accomplish in his lifetime what wasn't even considered for nearly 1,000 years dating back to feudal Europe where people were segregated into classes: a king, princes, nobles, priests, and peasants. He accomplished this transformation without guns, wars and hatred, but with words, deeds and faith. He initiated more than a movement, but a truth.

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

With that one sentence, one man redefined a nation, toppling the iconic idols of ignorance and hate.

Dr. King wasn't the only forerunner of that decade. In the Bronx was a family of five living at 1626 Mayflower Avenue, Ida and Carl Rappaport and their three children: Sandy, Michael, and Audrey. New York City, comprised of 5 boroughs and 2,000 neighborhoods, was place of parks and trees, beaches and skyscrapers. A place where it seemed everything was good, or was it? For Ida Rappaport, the diagnosis of Michael being developmentally disabled meant that he could never finish school. He could not graduate with his class, and the prospects for his future seemed to evaporate by all standards.

Ida Rappaport drew upon on her skills as a labor organizer for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, and went door to door to organize parents to challenge the unfair treatment of their children.

"The difference between average and winning is the perception and response to failure."
John Maxwell

What turned the corner for Michael and now thousands of other developmentally disabled individuals was the same never-take-no and an I-have-a-dream zeal of this feisty Jewish mamma, Ida Rappaport. It must have been something in the air at that time that made room for these two visionaries.

What I can learn from Dr. King and Ida Rappaport as we emerge from this pandemic is America always comes back.

At Lifespire, we understand these truths about big comebacks:

- Big changes can happen
- Relationships make all the difference sometimes
- Expect to work hard
- Never give up, even if you want to

When we celebrate Dr. King's birthday, we will keep his example before us, knowing that our mission matters, and our purpose gives to those we serve a promise of hope.



Thomas Lydon
CEO