

The Monti Navigator

Be Greater than the Average



Tammy Mangus, Superintendent of Schools

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in·spire

- 1. fill (someone) with the urge or ability to do or feel something, especially to do something creative.*

Dear Member of the Monticello Community,

During these next three months, we move to inspire – inspire our children, inspire each other and inspire ourselves. It's easier said than done, I'm afraid. The world is an interesting place, built on the shame, loss, failure and extinction of others. For one person to win, another must lose. It's a dreary reality where many believe that happiness is to be earned, where folks spend more time trying to find all the reasons why something cannot be done as opposed to diving in to flip the tide, no matter how impossible the task may seem. Not too inspiring, eh?

This past summer, I engaged in a simple team-building activity with a group of professionals. We were asked to link hands in a circle and pass a hula-hoop around from person to person without breaking our link. Our first go at the task was pitched as a 'practice' run. As a team, we were just learning the ropes. We awkwardly passed the hoop, person to person, laughing, smiling and offering support for those who stumbled. When complete, our coach stated that we had fulfilled the task in just over two minutes. At the second pass, she prompted us to beat our own time. We brushed off the idea that we couldn't. One person even said, "You are better at everything the second time around." They were correct. Without much hustle and a bit more practice, we accomplished the task in just under two minutes

Then our coach did something unthinkable: instead of asking us to plod along in our own successes, she asked us to set an ambitious goal for ourselves. She even dared to say, "Do you think you can do it in under a minute?" Our team immediately lost faith. We asked for buffer expectations, set lower targets for ourselves and created the list of reasons why we couldn't. Those who believed that we could argued for a bit, but caught up in the trend that it was safer to offer a lower target, ultimately quieted down. With the help of the coach, we agreed to a middle-of-the-road time: one and a half minutes. When the clock started, the dynamics of the circle had changed. Some were working to prove that we could beat the minute. Some were working to beat the lower standard. Some were working to prove that it is better to be safe than sorry. When the hoop had made it around, the coach had clocked our time at one minute, five seconds. She challenged us again. Could we do this in less than one minute? Again, the dynamics changed. Instead of a split majority working at two different time expectations, the vast majority worked to beat the one minute mark ...and we did.

How could we have believed that we couldn't? More importantly, why did we have to lower expectations for ourselves in order to find success? Certainly, we may not have made the one-minute mark on our first or second try. Practice doesn't make perfect, but it certainly builds skill. Even in this low-risk activity, why did we have to begin with an expectation of self-deprecation? I had to ask myself, if the low-risk goal was set to simply "beat our own time" would we have ultimately hit the one-minute mark on our own? How many times would we have had run through the task to meet that time?

But even deeper questions trolled around skulking in the background. Would we have made the connection that without much effort, we could knock a second off here or there and ultimately set ourselves up for the belief that the path of least resistance is best? Would we actually appreciate our accomplishment of beating ourselves? Would we have pressed ourselves as hard as we should have? Like the owl from Tootsie-Pop commercials of the 70's and 80's, we may never know. (For those who are still in their twenties, [watch here.](#))

But this much I do know: the valley between known successes and ambitious goals is where inspiration lives. Reaching only toward that which you know you can do is the downhill slope. The break-neck speed of the victorious tumble is certainly a rush, but it rarely provokes awe, esteem or reverence. Rather, when you look up toward those things that you fear impossible, pack your bags and begin the climb anyway, inspiration tags along. It can't help itself.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S):

How many failures are too many? Won't people question your authority or know-how if you make mistakes?

ESSENTIAL HABIT(S):

Get out of the safety zone; set goals for yourself and our children that challenge and inspire; do great things; and for the sake of inspiration, find success today.

Success

By Ralph Waldo Emerson

*To laugh often and much;
To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children;
To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends;
To appreciate beauty,
To find the best in others,
To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child,
A garden patch or a redeemed social condition;
To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived.
This is to have succeeded.*

Be well,

Tammy Mangus
Superintendent of Schools