



How to Cling to Hope in Bad Times

Note to Readers: Here's another offbeat e-update on business communication and current events from Write Company Plus, a corporate training firm located outside Philadelphia. In respect for your busy schedule, writers and editors have arranged seven at-a-glance ideas at the end of this article. Skip directly there if you lack the time to read the entire document. This week's article was created by special guest writer Mikey the Dog. His mother Dr. Kathleen Begley, the regular author, is trying to encourage his creative talents. Besides, she wanted to knock off for the week.

By Mikey the Dog

Last week, while putting in an eight-hour shift on my demanding job as professional snoozer at Write Company Plus communications training near Philadelphia, I happened across an interesting article in USA Today. I noticed it as I was pulling the remains of a grilled cheese sandwich out of the trash during a break from napping. The topic of the newspaper piece was the importance of keeping hope alive during difficult times.

The impetus behind the story was the growing number of recently laid off Americans struggling with depression. I was particularly intrigued by a quote from a California computer entrepreneur named Scott Rosenberg, who was fired several times before starting his own company earlier in this decade. "When you're out of work, you need to stay positive and think creatively," Rosenberg was quoted as saying. "Hope is everything."

I second the motion. Having gone through a long period of chronic unemployment myself, I know of what I bark. A little over five years ago, I was born to a Bichon Frise mother who had gotten impregnated by a Portuguese water dog (PWD) at a now-defunct puppy mill in Philadelphia. Please do not tell President Barack Obama that some PWD's – the breed he's considering for his daughters – are deadbeat dads.

In a humongous genetic miscoding, I came out of the womb looking as if God had realized only after he had built my legs and torso that he had forgotten to order a matching head. What to do? He chose to rummage hastily through spare parts, where he found a solid black head to place atop my solid white body. To most humans, I looked like a freak of nature. But the folks at Main Line Animal Rescue (MLAR) saw potential in me. When I was about two, they sprung me from my squalid cage in the inner city and moved me to a rustic farm in the suburbs.

Despite my limitations, I was determined to get a job. Through the rescue grapevine, I learned that millions of dogs around the world earn their keep doing such tasks as sniffing for drugs, pulling sleds, herding sheep, tugging fishing nets, acting in films, and visiting hospitals. I, too, wanted to be a contributing member of society. And so I spent every waking and sleeping moment hoping. In my dreams, I saw myself as a service dog working side by side with firefighters and police officers.

My longing for a career paid off in 2005 when my adoptive mother and father showed up at MLAR with their Portuguese water dogs Hershey and Pandy. They had seen my photo and resume on the Internet and showed up unannounced to interview me for a position as the newest member of their family. Much to my delight, I got the job right on the spot.

During the first few years in my new position, Hershey and Pandy trained me for a wide range of duties such as pooping outside and napping inside. They even taught me how to crinkle my face



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into a really pathetic expression when my dad was deciding whether to eat his last piece of pizza crust -- or to tear it into three pieces for us. By the time my big brother died in 2007 and my older sister passed on in 2008, I was well on my way to a supervisory position. But now there was no one to supervise.

With my grief-stricken mom saying after Pandy's death last May that she would never adopt another animal because of the excruciating pain of death, I figured my career had screeched to a sudden, but permanent, stop. But then, about a month ago, my mom learned that an increasing number of financially strapped individuals are turning their dogs and cats over to animal shelters. Many tearful owners sob openly during such surrenders about their inability to find pet-friendly apartments after being foreclosed out of their homes.

Horrified by the euthanasia of almost 5 million American dogs and cats in the last 12 months, my mom talked me and my dad into a quick visit to MLAR. We agreed we would just look at the animals, not actually adopt. It was an emotional trip, especially for me. I felt both grateful and guilty that almost 100 dogs as deserving as I still hadn't found jobs with forever families.

Despite our pledge to simply check out MLAR, the three of us decided in less than 10 minutes to adopt two painfully thin white fur balls named Abigail and Savanna. They were huddled together in the same tiled glass enclosure. When we got home, my mom thrilled me with a surprise announcement. Now that I had two younger sisters, she had decided to give me an official title: director of training at Write Company Plus. As my body leapt for joy, so did my heart.

Hope had paid off beyond my wildest dreams.

Recognizing that many of you are worried sick about job prospects not only for yourself but also for your families, friends, and colleagues, I offer you these tips about staying positive in tough times:

Install a mental firewall. If I were you, I would avoid people, places, and things that pull you down for any reason. When my mom and I watch the Animal Planet channel on television, for instance, we pick shows about canine cuisine rather than about dog abuse. I applaud the producers of the latter programs for their obvious intent to increase public awareness of animal cruelty; my mom says, however, that both she and I are too immature to handle the stark imagery.

Speak positively. To land a job, you need to talk positively outside and inside your head. Because of my mixed-breed heritage, I need to remind myself continually that I'm just as good as a full-blooded Irish wolfhound or German shepherd. To boost my self-esteem, I often repeat to myself a slogan created by North Shore Animal League, a New York based no-kill sanctuary for dogs: "Love Knows No Pedigree."

Keep busy. Even when I was cramped up in a cage without so much as a black-and-white console television, much less a modern flat screen, I found ways to amuse myself. Everyone might find licking their bodily parts less than appealing but, hey, it worked for me during some really dark moments. My dad says you should consider working out at the gym or playing tennis.

Help others. The main reason I begged my mom to let me write this column was to encourage those of you distraught over real or projected job loss. Instead of wringing your hands waiting for the phone to ring, you could help my friends at MLAR or other shelters. One of the main things discarded animals need is affection; there are far worse ways to spend a few hours than cuddling.



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Visualize a happy future. Neither you nor I know for sure what tomorrow will bring. It could be eating from bent dog food cans in a cardboard crate in Coatesville or strutting around as best in class at Westminster Dog Show in New York. Focusing on the first, ominous prediction is a subconscious way to feel in charge of your future – because negative thinking guarantees negative results. But you'll so much happier in the long run if you throw illusionary control to the winds and simply rejoice in life's surprises.

Believe in miracles. My mom loves to tell the tale of a dog named Butch. As an innocent puppy, he was blinded and maimed when his first owner drunkenly bashed him against a wall. Found near death by a government animal control agency, Butch came to the attention of my mom's friend Jim – a dog lover who just happened to stop in one day at the animal shelter in another state where Butch was awaiting execution. Instead, he got adopted. Jim and Butch lived happily together for more than five years. Then, one morning while sitting in his favorite chair, Jim unexpectedly died. A half hour later, a friend who had stopped by for coffee found his lifeless body. The visitor called emergency workers, who quickly arrived to pick up the remains. The biggest challenge turned out to be not removing Jim's corpse, but removing Butch from Jim's lap. Talk about a faithful companion.

Never, ever, ever give up. After four glorious years working, I continue to marvel at the change in my circumstances. One day, I was trying to get a job from a barren four-by-four-foot kennel with a cement floor; the next, I was earning my keep in a fully-equipped home office with a cushy L.L. Bean bed. So hang in there, my unfurry friends. By refusing to give up hope, I predict that you, too, will someday become a lucky dog.

Dr. Kathleen Begley owns and operates Write Company Plus communications training. She has written seven books and gives corporate seminars on topics such as writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can call her at 610-429-1562 or e-mail her at KBegley@writecompanyplus.com. She responds to everybody. Mikey will get back to you if you send Milk Bones.