

PEPPERDINE

Human Resources



Right after college, I was a high school history teacher. One of my most moving moments in my history class was to play the 1963 video footage of Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech to my class. At the end of the speech, my teenage students, usually wiggling in their chairs, sat still and silent. I now show this historic speech in my law school classes as a way to teach advocacy, and more importantly as way to show how one person's leadership can spark a remarkable movement of change. My law students' reactions are the same of those of my high school students after watching Dr. King deliver this speech – stillness and silence.

While I prepared to write this short statement, I listened once again to Dr. King's speech. During his fourth cry of, "I have a dream," my five-year old daughter crawled on my lap to listen, making Dr. King's dream that his "four little children will live in a nation where they not be judged by the color of their skin but the content of their character" all the more poignant.

What makes Dr. King's words so moving? So powerful? Obviously, Dr. King is one of the best orators of our times, but his words are so powerful because he lived them out, and lived them out during the

times when he was most discouraged and tired. He was only 39 years old when he was assassinated, but the doctors who did the autopsy found he had the heart of a 60 year old due to the stress of his life. Despite the pressures of his work, he was deeply committed to his core principles. So on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, let's take a moment to reflect on a few things we might learn from the encouraging words and actions of this inspirational man.

Relentlessly seek justice. Dr. King never gave up seeking what his conscience demanded of him. "If you can't fly, then run. If you can't run, then walk. If you can't walk, then crawl. But whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward." Why keep moving forward? Because, in the words of Dr. King, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." Amazing words to embrace during times when we are facing discouragement or obstacles – keep moving forward towards our vision of what we believe would make our lives, our families, our nation, and our world a better reflection of our Creator.

Love. "Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that." Incredible statements from a man who received daily death threats. If we can react in love and mercy, and most importantly do so in times of hate, that is when the light of love will shine the brightest.

Walk humbly. When Dr. King decided where to march, when to take actions that would lead to his arrest, when to embrace peace instead of violence, he was thinking of others. He said, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'" Perhaps today we can breathe life into those around us by focusing on what we can do for them, on how our actions can breathe life into them.

These are bold and life-changing principles. Principles captured in the final phrase of the Book of Micah, in verse 6.8: ". . . what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" Principles which, on a day like today, can cause such awe that it brings us to a moment of stillness and silence.

Naomi Goodno
Dean of Students and Professor of Law
