



Kids at Hope:

Every Child Can Succeed, No Exceptions

**Dispelling the myth that kids are at risk.*

John P. Carlos

Co-Author of the International Best Seller
Empowerment Takes More Than a Minute

Rick Miller

Founder, Kids at Hope

With Forewords by

Ken Blanchard

Co-Author of the One Minute Manager Book Series

&

Rosey Grier

Chairman, Impact Urban America
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Sagamore Publishing, LLC
804 N Neil
Champaign, IL 61822

<http://www.sagamorepub.com>

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2009935100

ISBN:978-1-57167-577-4

Printed in the United States of America

Dedication

This book is dedicated to our grandchildren, who are
our Kids at Hope.

Madison Oleno
Megan Oleno
Kaitlyn Antunes
Delaney Antunes
Gabrielle Heredia
Jakob Emilio Heredia
Adrian Joaquin Magana-Miller

Special Dedication To:

Allan E. Miller,

my brother,
who each day demonstrates the power of hope

Foreword

by
Ken Blanchard

When John Carlos asked me to write the foreword for his book *Kids at Hope: Every Child Can Succeed, No Exceptions* co-authored by Rick Miller, I was thrilled for two reasons. First of all, I'm a big fan of John Carlos. The title on his business card sums it up. John calls himself "The Story Teller." He is one of the greatest teachers I know. He has always cared about the plight of kids. In fact, in the 20 years before we became friends, John had already worked with the Foundation for the Junior Blind as a coach for multi-handicapped blind children, for Rancho San Antonio "Boys Town of the West" as a counselor, and Saddle Club director and for three different member agencies of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America. So John is not only a great teacher, he is also one of the most caring human beings I know.

The second reason I am happy to write this foreword, is that I really think *Kids at Hope* could be the most important book written in the last decade to remedy the crisis of despair and lack of hope among our youth in America. I've known for a long time that the mind and the computer are similar in one way. They don't readily know the difference between the truth and what they are told.

If you put information in a computer, it doesn't ask, "Where did you get those figures? Those figures are wrong!" The computer does whatever it can with what you give it. For a long time, we've described the computer's ability to process information as "garbage in, garbage out." The same is true of the mind. The mind does not

know the difference between the truth and what you tell it. If you get up in the morning, look in the mirror and say, “You are fabulous,” your mind doesn’t say, “Who are you kidding? I know better.”

So, how we program kids’ minds and what we put in is really important. I think John and Rick are really onto something. For a long time, we’ve talked about kids “at risk.” What a self-fulfilling prophecy that is—whereas *Kids at Hope* is all about every child having the capacity to succeed, no exceptions.

Now, positive thinking isn’t the only thing that’s great about this book. I learned by working with Norman Vincent Peale on our book, *The Power of Ethical Management*, that when people read his classic book, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, sometimes they assumed all you had to have is positive thinking. Norman said, “That’s not true. You also have to take some action. Just thinking positively isn’t going to make you succeed.” What do you do to succeed?

What’s great about *Kids at Hope* are the tremendous ideas in here about what can be done in schools and communities to really create a culture of hope.

It’s important that you hear the word “culture,” because this book is not about establishing programs. Programs come and go, but if you can create a culture of hope, then everything that’s done is done to help every kid succeed.

The big thing that Carlos and Miller emphasize is that everyone in our schools and the community, in the home and everywhere, should be responsible for kids’ successes. These authors have great suggestions. In fact, they talk about the four aces that kids should have in their hands.

- Kids need anchor parents—parents who absolutely love them unconditionally and are there to support them.

- Kids need other caring adults (heroic figures)!
- Kids need high expectations and supportive adults who encourage kids to reach for goals that may, to the child, seem unattainable but are actually within reach.
- Kids also need opportunities to succeed.

So, read this book. Use this book! I believe it's the answer to empowering our kids to become the successful, happy adults they deserve to become.

Now, let me turn this foreword over to my friend and colleague, Rosey Grier. Rosey is a National Football League great, having played with the New York Giants, but he is best known as one of the Fearsome Foursome of the Los Angeles Rams. He has worked with the youth in this country relentlessly for over 30 years.

Recently, Rosey and I appeared before a U.S. Congressional committee that was looking into the drug situation in this country. Before we had a chance to speak, the senior congressman on the panel said, "I want to put it on the record that I am honored to be in the presence of Rosey Grier. A lot of people come and go around popular movements and ideas, but when that goes down, they're gone." He said, "Mr. Grier, you have devoted your life to supporting and encouraging and helping the youth, and I value that."

That's who Rosey Grier is. That's how much he cares about what John Carlos and Rick Miller are writing about.

Foreword

by
Rosey Grier

I love *Kids at Hope*. I think this is a fabulous book. When I first started traveling around the country into urban areas to help the youth, I was appalled by the run-down buildings I saw. In becoming familiar with those environments, I realized the buildings and apartments where people lived were not only run-down, but they were symptomatic of the lack of vision and hopelessness of the people. I concluded that when people change, the entire environment changes. Helping people change has been my quest for more than three decades. I want to make a difference for these young people, and so do John Carlos and Rick Miller.

One of the reasons I am excited about *Kids at Hope* is that not only are John and Rick trying to show people how to change kids' attitudes, but they are working on developing kids' skills and talents. This will enable kids to possess the tools necessary to make their lives more meaningful. When a person is prepared, and the opportunity presents itself, she or he is able to seize that opportunity and be productive.

Education is the molding force in preparing youth for their future endeavors. Creative teachers establish the atmosphere that is conducive for learning. Kids are motivated when the right atmosphere for learning is present. Singer BMX explains in a rap, "First, I'm going to crawl, then I'm going to walk, then I'm going to stand, then I'm going to talk, then I got to learn, then I'm gonna' teach, then I'm going to burn and I'm gonna reach." It's up

to everyone involved in the lives of children to encourage kids to continue reaching.

Great attitudes and great skills will bring great success to everyone. Read *Kids at Hope*.

It is a continual challenge to set the stage for learning. Get your school and community involved in this important challenge to bring out the best we can in the young people of this country.

Table of Contents

<i>Forewords</i>	7, 11
<i>Introduction</i>	15
<i>Background</i>	19

Chapter One

The Visit Universal Truths I & II	24
Everyone has a different task at school, but we all share the same responsibility—to ensure the success of all our children, no exceptions.	

Chapter Two

The Classroom (A Celebration of Success)	38
We help our children succeed holistically.	

Chapter Three

What Makes a Difference?	49
You must first reach a child before you can teach a child.	

Chapter Four

No Exceptions!	57
For children to win the game of life, they need Aces. Adults control the Aces and must deal them to the children. The more Aces we deal children, the greater their chances of success.	

Chapter Five

Defining Hope Universal Truth III	73
Life is not only a journey, it has destinations.	

Chapter Six: Hope Square (*Hope²*) 84
A community that cares about its children must express such caring in everything and anything they do.

Chapter Seven: High Fives..... 91
When the future is all about children, then children must be all about the future.

Chapter Eight: Mr. Dawson Goes to Washington 97

Conclusion: From Parable to Reality

The Kids at Hope Story Continues

A Sampling of Case Studies from

Across the Country..... 100

Author Bios..... 119, 121

Introduction

Since its original publication in 2001, and revised editions in 2007 and again in 2009, *Kids at Hope* has truly captured the hopeful imagination of tens of thousands of caring adults across the country. Their belief in the potential of every young person has been restored and revalidated by this book. Each year, through one of our professional development seminars, institutes, classes, train the trainer events, books, videos, or keynote addresses, over 3,000 new “treasure hunters” from many walks of life are introduced to the Kids at Hope belief system and strategy.

Over the past several years, as we have established Kids at Hope models in communities, youth organizations, recreation sites, fire and police departments, and schools we have a much better understanding of the popular adage, “It takes a village to raise and educate a child.” We know that statement is true, but it begs two questions: Who trains the village, and who in the village is invited to the training? Once you can articulate the question it makes it much easier to find the answer. We have learned that the capacity of Kids at Hope offers a model of training that reaches out to every adult, not because of their educational or professional status, but simply and most powerfully because of their interest in our youth.

You will discover through the adventures of our story protagonist, Robert Dawson, the Three Universal Truths and their High Five Practices that support a child’s success. Robert Dawson learns that he must be able to see a future, which doesn’t exist but is within reach. That has always, and will always be the only way we can shape our destiny. So, our basic question is, can we see a future where all children can succeed and there will not be any exceptions?

It hasn't been easy changing the paradigm and associated culture, which has taught us that many children are *at risk*, and therefore we shouldn't expect much from them. As a matter of fact, in one state in our union, planners look at second grade achievement scores as part of the formula they will need to determine how many prison cells they will require in the future. Talk about a self-fulfilling prophecy. I cannot imagine giving up on children in the second grade. I cannot imagine ever giving up on our kids. But whether we think we are or not, that is exactly what we do every day without even knowing it.

The youth *at-risk* label has prematurely judged our young people guilty until proven innocent. An entire industry has been created by the *at-risk* label. We have responded to the guilty verdict and its subsequent *at-risk* culture by ordering our youth to enter a series of prevention or intervention programs. For every pathology or potential pathology, we have created a separate program or activity to help children avoid negative and damaging behavior. Although laudable at first glance, these prevention programs have institutionalized the *at-risk* stereotype to the point where we have ignored our children's assets and strengths in order to focus on their problems and deficits. By doing so, we have unconsciously prohibited many children from achieving their unique scholastic, spiritual, social, and emotional potential.

Yet, in the face of these odds, Kids at Hope continues to make remarkable progress. I guess we are proving the renowned anthropologist Margaret Mead correct when she said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has." I have come to respect and appreciate Dr. Mead's expression in action, and not just words. I wish I could say Kids at Hope had the uncompromising enthusiasm and leadership of many. We did not. What we

did have was the commitment and shared vision of a few. And that was enough.

On behalf of all the children who have benefited from our efforts and who without question would have wallowed in the purgatory known as *at-risk* programs, I thank each and every one of you—you know who you are. I also thank those individuals and groups who are sharing their imagination in providing the intellectual, emotional, and financial capital needs to advance Kids at Hope.

I am quite excited about this third, newly revised edition of our book, *Kids at Hope: Every Child Can Succeed, No Exceptions*. This book, like our initiative, evolves each year. We are trying to keep pace with the experience and ongoing research associated with our initiative. We are equally excited to share our efforts with our colleagues in the fields of resiliency theory, research, and application as well as the maturing field of positive psychology. We continue to explore related disciplines in the fields of human services and education to ensure our principles and practices represent the best evidence available in support of the success of all children, without exception.

As with our previous editions, I am saddened by my co-author and dear friend John Carlos' sudden death in 2004 and that he is not with me to see this powerful initiative grow each year to a national and international initiative. John's spirit, however, is alive and strong in this book and the phenomenal message and action it offers in support of the success of all children, no exceptions!

Rick Miller

Founder and Chief Treasure Hunter

Kids at Hope

Background

In the early 1980s, the National Commission on Excellence in Education presented a study entitled “A Nation at Risk.”

Its findings spawned an entire new culture and ultimate industry within our human services network by suggesting that many of America’s children were “at risk.” These children were threatened by a number of social and environmental factors that would seal their fate. They came from single-parent homes, or no-parent homes, were victims of child abuse or neglect, had parents who did not value education or were unable to speak the country’s native tongue, lived in poverty, or were exposed to drugs, gangs, and related conditions. The more we studied these “at-risk” factors, the more “at-risk” factors we discovered. It wasn’t long until many local and national leaders began to proclaim that many if not all America’s children were “at risk.”

With that, we heralded in a new era. Federal, state, and local governments, United Ways, foundations, and other funding sources challenged our service providers to retool their organizations to deal with these newly identified “at-risk” children. The more “at-risk” children you can identify, the more funds for which you would be eligible. It didn’t take youth groups and education systems long before they could pronounce all children “at risk.” It wasn’t even necessary to look at children as individuals; we could make such a declaration once a neighbor or community was considered “at risk.”

Yet, no one realized what the effect might be on the kids who were told they were “at risk.” Did it occur to anyone that once a child hears that he or she is “at risk” to do something bad, chances are they’ll believe it? And chances are, if they believe it, they’ll eventually “be it.” How about the adults who serve those children in the education or human services fields? Would the “at-risk” paradigm affect their conscious and unconscious beliefs and associated behaviors toward those children?

This notion implied that kids could not be trusted to be “at hope.” In other words, it is wrong to assume that all kids want to be successful in life?

Or so they told us. Well, we personally had a hard time believing that kids woke up in the morning, looked in the mirror, and said to themselves, “Today, I will fail!”

“Supervise them closely, keep them busy, and always be on guard,” we were told.

We were quick to identify the types of programs children would need that prevent them from the threats that swirled around them. If drugs were a problem, we directed our resources to drug prevention programs. Gangs? We created gang prevention programs. School drop outs? School drop-out prevention programs. Our creativity was limited to piling on as many prevention or intervention programs as our imaginations could conceive. Our fundamental error was children don’t grow up in programs or institutions; they grow up in communities. They are the sum total of all of their experiences, and yet we tried to divide and conquer these problems one at a time. Not only did we try to defeat these problems, we tried to do it by ignoring the “at-hope” factors that all of these children naturally possess.

So how have we been doing? Unfortunately, not so well. One only needs to look at our school achievement data or juvenile crime issues—gangs, drugs—or the number of children who just wander through life aimlessly to realize

what we are doing isn't working well enough to help all children succeed.

So where do the answers lie? Well, not in focusing on our children's deficits or simply by creating one disconnected program after another.

Along with our colleagues in medicine, psychology, sociology, recreation, education, social work, and criminology, we began to look elsewhere for answers.

Albert Einstein changed the entire world of physics in the early 1900s by suggesting in his famous equation, $E=mc^2$, that energy and mass were different sides of the same coin. With that simple observation, he helped us more accurately understand our universe and how to harness its power.

What can we learn from Professor Einstein? For too long, we have only studied one side of the coin related to our children. We need to refocus our resources to a new science about our youth, one that would help us better understand and harness the hope side, the resiliency side, and the nature and nurture sides.

To achieve that purpose, we began to explore the new and emerging fields associated with human strengths, assets, brain research, and resiliency theory and application. We found fascinating research and cases studies in a wide range of disciplines. During a seven-year review, we began to identify not one study or another that seemed to underscore our understanding about how children succeed, even those who face many of life's greatest and horrific adversities, obstacles and challenges, but a series of the recurring themes that continued to appear throughout the disciplines we were exploring. The end result was our discovery of what we now reference as the *Three Universal Truths* needed to support the success of all children, without exception.

Subsequently, over an additional period of four years we learned about a series of five powerful and simple

applications that would support the Three Universal Truths. We refer to those practices as our *High Fives*.

Our challenge was to identify a process and a format that would create not another new program on top of all the other new programs but to harness, as Einstein did, all the forces of the universe. We defined our universe as an organization, agency or community's culture. Our contribution was the development of a strategic cultural framework.

Furthermore, we wanted to establish a user-friendly understanding and protocol associated with the Three Universal Truths and its High Five Practices. Our goal was to make our findings available equally to any member of the culture/community, not just isolated to those who specialize in a program service or activity. It wasn't enough to empower human service or education administrators, social workers, psychologists, counselors, teachers, youth development workers, or other related professionals or para professionals.

If we were to truly harness the power of the universe/culture, we need to include the not-so-usual suspects as well as the usual suspects we just referenced. What would happen if we invited the school bus drivers, custodial and food service staff, or front-office personnel, parents, and shopowners? What happens when the village is empowered to help all children succeed, without exception?

Our next challenge was how to present these *Three Universal Truths* and their *High Five Practices* in a manner that achieves our goal to empower an entire community and all the adults in the community who truly wish to believe in and support the success of all children.

Furthermore, we also wanted to validate those exceptional adults who chose not to buy into the *youth-at-risk* paradigm in spite of the misguided conventional wisdom of the day.

This book is one of many vehicles used in our efforts to share these remarkable truths and practices.

Therefore, you will find this book much different from other books that have done a wonderful job in sharing the new thinking and information related to resiliency, positive psychology, asset development, and brain research, all in an effort to help us advance our knowledge about children.

We chose to present our findings as a parable to demonstrate how we can bridge research with practice. By doing so, not only is the reader introduced to a series of profound, evidenced-based facts about youth, but he or she is also invited to enter the story where we have translated that data into a simple cultural framework at work every day in the City of Harrison.

Our findings are universal in their application. The story shared in this book is happening all over the country, including rural, urban and suburban communities.

At the end of this story, we have included a number of articles we have published in newspapers and magazines. It keeps our thinking fresh and our ability to share those insights with our readers.

We trust you will find our approach a unique and interesting way to learn about the emerging fields related to education as well as child and youth development and how this work can easily be used by an entire village with remarkable success.



One

The Visit

Universal Truths I & II

“WELCOME to Harrison, a Kids at Hope City, where the local time is 6:55 a.m.,” came the announcement over the airplane’s speakers as flight 236 taxied into its gate.

“A Kids at Hope City?” questioned Robert Dawson silently. “Is that what the flight attendant said?”

Robert gathered his personal belongings, and as he approached the plane’s door, he stopped for a moment to speak to the flight attendant.

“Did you say something about a Kids at Hope City?” queried Robert.

“Yes, sir,” the polite attendant responded, “Harrison is a Kids at Hope City.”

“What is a Kids at Hope City?” asked Robert.

“Simply speaking, it’s a community . . . ,” the flight attendant was interrupted by a gate agent who apparently had an emergency. “Sorry, got to go,” the attendant apologized and quickly disappeared into the jet way.

Robert’s interest was piqued, but he had an appointment he needed to rush to, so off he went to claim his baggage. As he boarded the downward escalator, he noticed an illuminated display sign advertising, “Welcome to Harrison, A Kids at Hope City.” At the bottom right of the sign appeared the city logo that read, “Incorporated 1926.” On the left side of the sign was a sunburst logo with three starlike characters that read. “Kids at Hope No Exceptions!”

“Interesting,” was Robert’s immediate thought. He believed this intriguing secret would soon be revealed.

After picking up his checked bags and rental car, Robert headed off to his 9 a.m. appointment with Mildred Ramirez, principal of Lincoln Elementary School.

It was 8:15 a.m., and traffic was unusually lighter than he had expected. He arrived for his appointment much earlier than scheduled.

The extra 45 minutes was a welcomed luxury. Robert normally ran late for his meetings, but not this time. Robert had a moment to catch his breath before his customary busy day. He seemed to truly enjoy the fact that life had slowed down, and instead of feeling like a hostage of time, he began to observe the rhythm of students, teachers, and staff preparing for another school day. He headed toward the school office.

“Sometimes you miss a lot of important things when you are so busy being busy,” he mused.

“Stop and smell the roses,” he remembered his wife telling him. And for a moment, he was “smelling the roses.”

A school bus stopped about 30 feet from where Robert was standing. Robert watched as the students disembarked. Curiously, the bus driver caught Robert’s eye.

As each child left the bus, Robert overheard the driver encouraging the children. “Do your best today. I’m proud of you,” he said to every boy and girl, looking each one directly in the eye. A few students actually stopped and whispered something in the driver’s ear. Each comment was exchanged for a smile and off the children ran to their classrooms.

When the bus was emptied, a young woman ran over to the driver and slipped him a note.

Robert was surprised by the unusual interactions he was witnessing. Robert decided to approach the bus driver.

“Hi, and excuse me,” Robert said, as he extended his hand to the driver. “My name is Robert Dawson, and I’m visiting from the U.S. Department of Education.”

“Hello, my kids call me ‘Chief,’” responded the bus driver, as he shook Robert’s hand.

“I couldn’t help but notice how you interacted with each of the students from your bus,” Robert offered. “I mean, you seemed to genuinely express interest in each and every one of them.”

“Well, they’re my kids,” Chief proudly noted. “I know what you are thinking. Bus drivers drive buses, teachers teach, and administrators administer.”

“I guess that is what I’m getting at,” Robert said.

“Not here,” Chief said. “At our school, we are all responsible for our kids.”

“Could you please explain what you mean by that?” Robert politely asked.

“Sure. When I applied for this job, I filled out a regular application. You know, name, address, and experience, the whole ball of wax. But when I was interviewed, everything was a bit unusual.”

“I’m not quite following you,” Robert said.

“Well, in my previous bus-driving jobs, I am normally interviewed by the director of transportation or a high-level supervisor. The questions are usually the same. But this interview was anything but normal. First, the committee was made up of the principal, a teacher, parents, and the transportation supervisor. They all interviewed me. They asked me questions about how driving a bus could help a student succeed in school. I confess that question floored me. Why would they be asking me that type of question? After all, I wasn’t applying as a teacher. I just wanted to be a bus driver. It’s not rocket science, you know?” Chief said.

Robert asked, “What happened?”

“Well, the interview committee said, ‘All our employees must focus on the end result ... the success of all our kids,’” Chief answered.

“The committee then asked me to complete a one-question survey,” added the Chief.

Chief described a survey that asked, “*Do you believe all children are capable of success, no exceptions?*”

On a scale from “1” to “10,” with the number one representing strongly disbelieve or disagree with that statement and the number ten representing strongly believe or agree with the statement. Numbers from 2-9 are degrees from strongly disbelieve/disagree to strongly believe/agree.

“Fascinating,” responded Robert.

The school district refers to that survey as the *World’s Most Important Question*.

“We ask everyone that question who applies for a job with our district,” stated Chief.

Robert learned that the district had commissioned a study to better understand why some children, especially those who face seemingly insurmountable obstacles, adversities, and challenges in life still seem to succeed, while many others who had all the advantages appeared to struggle. The district learned that conventional wisdom of the past that supported the belief that children from poverty, homes with neglectful or even abusive parents, high incidence of drugs and gangs, parents who performed poorly in school were illiterate, or who could not speak or write in the language of the country they live, were “at risk,” of failing educationally, socially, emotionally, and economically.

The district’s research revealed three powerful findings that have transformed the school culture from one “at risk” to one “at hope.” Those findings are now referred to as the “Three Universal Truths,” because they appear

throughout the scientific literature including medicine, sociology, psychology, social work, education, recreation, and criminology. In other words, the district was focusing on the success factors that all children need rather than obsessing over the “at-risk” excuses that have been refuted.

The first of the powerful Universal Truths state that:

Universal Truth #1:

Children succeed when they are surrounded by adults who believe they can succeed, without exception.

Armed with that first finding/universal truth, the district needed to know whether they were surrounding children with adults who believed that *all children are capable of success and there are no exceptions*, regardless of the student’s environmental or personal conditions.

“I get it,” noted Robert, “If adults don’t believe that all children can succeed, they may unconsciously support a student’s failure.”

“That’s it!” answered Chief. “And unfortunately, they won’t even know it.”

Robert remembered studying the *Pygmalion Effect* from his college days. A landmark study that proved that teachers’ impressions of children, whether those assessments are accurate or not, impact students’ achievements, good and bad. He hadn’t thought much about that study since his undergraduate days, but it appears to still make sense.

“What happens when an applicant chooses a number other than ten?” questioned Robert.

“That becomes problematic,” answered a voice from behind Robert.

It was the woman who earlier slipped Chief, the bus driver, a note.

Robert turned around and was introduced to Ms. Thomas, a fifth grade teacher at Lincoln Elementary School.

Ms. Thomas added that if applicants or even current teachers, administrators, or staff can't choose "10" they, not the students or their parents or even their social circumstances, may unwittingly be placing students "at risk."

"That really does shed a whole new way of thinking about our children," concluded Robert.

Ms. Thomas noted that when the school first introduced the *World's Most Important Question*, the average score was certainly less than ten.

"We weren't surprised by our findings," continued Ms. Thomas. "We understood that for much too long we have offered our faculty and staff wrong information about success and failure. We bought into the 'at-risk' paradigm and gave up on too many children, especially those children who really needed someone to believe they could make it despite their circumstances."

Chief nodded approvingly, agreeing with Ms. Thomas' assessment.

Since the *World's Most Important Question* was introduced, the district now understands how important it is to its students to hire people who can choose number 10. The district also supports professional development experiences that focus on the body of research that validates the importance of an adult's belief in children.

"Our people need to know as do their parents and community, the power of our beliefs in children . . . all children," re-emphasized Ms. Thomas.

"Hey, I have to run, I have to get to my class," a hurried Ms. Thomas, just realized. "Hope to catch you later."

"Before you leave, can you tell me about the note you left with Chief?" asked Robert.

“I was letting Chief know that one of my students was improving nicely, and I suggested he comment about it when he next sees her,” responded Ms. Thomas.

With that, Ms. Thomas disappeared as quickly as she had appeared a few moments earlier.

Robert and Chief continued their conversation.

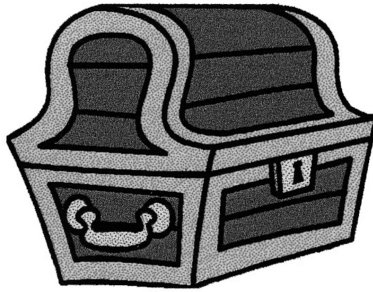
“Do you know what my title is?” Chief asked Robert.

“School bus driver, I assume,” Robert responded.

“You’re half right,” Chief said. “It’s bus driver and treasure hunter. Sorry to cut this short, but I have a field trip I need to prepare for,” noted Chief. “Nice meeting you.”

“Same here,” said Robert.

As Chief boarded his bus and drove off, Robert glanced at the back of the bus where that same *Kids at Hope* logo appeared. **NO EXCEPTIONS** it boldly read.



Treasure Hunter: A caring adult who searches beneath the surface to find all the talents, skills, and intelligence that exist in children.

“May I help you?” asked a friendly voice from behind the counter in the school’s office.

“Hello, I’m Robert Dawson, and I have a 9 a.m. appointment with Mrs. Ramirez.”

“Welcome to Lincoln Elementary, a Kids at Hope School,” offered Esther Disen, school secretary.

“Hmmm,” Robert thought to himself. “A Kids at Hope School, a Kids at Hope City, a Kids at Hope bus, a Treasure Hunter and the *World’s Most Important Question* . . . Hmmm.”

The secretary just smiled at Robert as he was quietly contemplating his thoughts.

“Please be seated, Mr. Dawson. I’ll let Mrs Ramirez know that you are here,” the school secretary said.

As he waited two students, a boy and a girl, ran up to the counter.

“You made it!” the secretary noted, “Good for you. Here is a *Glad You Made It* pass. Now hurry up!”

Robert was somewhat taken aback by what he had just seen. Two students who were obviously late would normally get a little scolding and a late pass to get them into class. But that is not what he observed.

“Excuse me . . . may I ask you a question?” Robert asked the secretary.

“Indeed,” was her response.

“Those two students were late, but you seemed to dismiss their tardiness,” reported Robert.

“Well, it’s not that simple,” answered the secretary. “Lots of our students face some real hardships getting to school. Like most schools, we frown upon tardiness, but we learned in many cases not to blame the children, especially those children we know are embarrassed by their lateness.

“Often it’s not their fault. So, as part of our Kids at Hope culture, we celebrate attendance, knowing that many of our children make a great and sincere effort to get to school even under difficult circumstances.”

Robert thought about the secretary's answer for a few moments. *Glad You Made It* instead of a tardy slip? This was the school's effort to catch kids doing things right, and for many of them, getting to school was the right thing to do in spite of the hardships in their lives.

Robert discovered that for many years, the school had had a poor attendance history. Instead of looking for blame, they sought solutions. One answer was to encourage good attendance by limiting the negative attention offered to tardiness and replacing it with positive recognition for making it to school.

"This Kids at Hope school thing is getting more and more curious," thought Robert.

Robert thanked the secretary for her explanation.

"Incidentally," she noted, "You know I am also a Treasure Hunter."

A second later, two more children entered the office. They appeared to be brother and sister, and both were returning from a doctor's appointment. "Now, quickly, before I give you your pass, tell me about something you succeeded in yesterday," the secretary/treasure hunter requested.

Robert, listening to the conversation, found the question unusual. However, the girl, whom he believed to be eight years old, blurted out, "I won the spelling bee yesterday!"

"Good for you, Leah," complimented the secretary. "How about you, Torry?" she asked.

Torry looked about six or seven years old.

"I don't know," was Torry's timid response.

"What do you mean, you don't know? In our school everyone succeeds every day, somehow and somewhere," the secretary encouraged.

"Not Torry," his sister piped in. "He didn't do so well on his writing project yesterday."

“I’m sure he’ll do better next time. Right, Torry?” asked the secretary. “Although grades are very important, they are not the only way to measure success. Can’t you think of something you did well yesterday, Torry?” the secretary persisted.

“I helped my mom with the dishes, and she said I did a good job,” Torry recalled.

“That’s good! That’s good!” responded the secretary. “There are lots of ways to be successful, and they are all important. Good job, Torry and good job, Leah! I’m proud of the two of you. Now get to class, pronto!”

Soon after the children ran out of the office, Mildred Ramirez, the school principal, greeted Robert.

“I’m sorry I made you wait, Mr. Dawson. Welcome to our Kids at Hope school,” Mrs. Ramirez said.

“It’s no problem. I’ve really enjoyed watching your staff interact with the students,” he said.

“Would you like something to drink, Mr. Dawson?” Mrs. Ramirez asked.

“A cup of coffee would work,” Robert said.

“Coming up,” responded Mrs. Ramirez. “So, what brings you all the way from Washington, D.C.?” she asked.

“I’m preparing a report for the Secretary of Education about exemplary school programs, and your school was recommended for observation,” Robert answered.

“I’m flattered, Mr. Dawson. What would you like to know?” Mrs. Ramirez asked.

Before addressing his formal questions, Robert was anxious to know more about what he had seen earlier.

“When our plane landed this morning, the flight attendant welcomed us to Harrison, ‘A Kids at Hope City,’” stated Dawson. “There was a sign at the airport also welcoming us to a Kids at Hope City. I then saw the Kids at Hope logo on one of your buses, and both you and

your secretary refer to Lincoln Elementary as a Kids at Hope school. So what's the story behind the story?" asked Robert.

"Well, let me try to explain," offered Mrs. Ramirez.

"About seven years ago, this school was having a lot of problems. Performance was low, behavioral problems were high, morale was low, and teacher turnover was high. We needed to take some action—and fast—or we were headed for real disaster."

"What did you do?" Robert asked.

"Well, first our district commissioned a study about why some kids succeed regardless of the adversity they experience, and others don't," described Mrs. Ramirez.

"Yes, I learned a little about that earlier this morning," responded Robert.

"Then you know about our belief system, that all children are capable of success, No Exceptions.

"I'm beginning to," stated Robert.

"Well, let me add a little more background to how we got here," continued Mrs. Ramirez.

"We realized that the job of educating our children was not just the responsibility of the school and its teachers, but that the entire community had a role in the success of our children. Our quality of life is directly tied to our students' success. We also realized that the school's responsibility was to set the tone for the rest of the community. In other words, if we didn't believe that all our children could succeed and act like we believe that, we couldn't create the culture we now understood was required on behalf of all children. We needed to create a culture where we could select ten on the *World's Most Important Question*. So, we began by redefining all of our roles in terms of the end result. For example, 'success' rather than 'job descriptions,'" Mrs. Ramirez said. "We then engaged our entire city in a remarkable experiment."

“Why don’t I give you a tour? It’s easier to understand if you see it in action,” Mrs. Ramirez suggested.

As Mrs. Ramirez and Roger Dawson left for their tour of the campus, Mr. Dawson asked about the Three Universal Truths that were revealed in the school district’s study.

“That study got all of us on the same page,” responded Mrs. Ramirez. “I understand you have already been introduced to Universal Truth One, which states that *children succeed when they are surrounded by adults who believe they can succeed*. Our school added *No Exceptions* to that finding. Let me tell you about Universal Truth Two.”

Mrs. Ramirez’s voice increased in pace and volume, as she was obviously excited to share information about the second Universal Truth.

“The study’s second most profound finding was that “Children succeed when they have meaningful and sustainable relationships with caring adults,” offered Mrs. Ramirez. “Although that finding, like Universal Truth number one, seems so obvious, its practice is not as apparent.

“What do you mean?” asked Mr. Dawson.

Mrs. Ramirez explained that as part of its efforts to understand the implications of each of the Universal Truths, it had to collect baseline data. In the case of Universal Truth number two, the district had to determine whether or not its students were experiencing meaningful and sustainable relationships with caring adults. According to Mrs. Ramirez, the results were not too encouraging.

“Our study discovered that 20 percent of our students were not connected by a meaningful and sustainable relationship with a caring adult. Talk about a wake-up call. . . .” stated Mrs. Ramirez. “If we are trying to help children succeed, we need to connect with them, and that wasn’t happening. Growing up disconnected from adults removes a needed buffer from the threats that exist in any young person’s life.

“So what did you do?” asked Mr. Dawson.

“A whole lot,” answered Mrs. Ramirez. “I’ll tell you more after we visit Mrs. Rashad’s class.

Universal Truth #2:

Children succeed when they have meaningful and sustainable relationships with caring adults.

Dawson’s Reflection:

There was a “Chief” in my life. It was in the third grade, but he was not a bus driver. He was the school janitor, but neither I nor any of my classmates ever thought of him as the janitor. He was “Ed.” Ed always had kind words. I can still hear his Irish brogue saying, “Top ‘o the mornin’ to everyone.” I remember him sharing his lunch and his time with us. He always offered to help us clean up our mess at the lunch table. He had this old army jeep. We thought it was so cool. I wonder now if Ed wasn’t really a teacher in disguise.

Everyone is a teacher, huh? Why does that make me think of my vacation in Ireland? Ah, yes, the boomerang. I remember now. It was a supermarket, SuperQuinn.

When we entered the market, the first thing my wife said was, “How strange. The employee name tags are shaped like miniature boomerangs.”

I thought, “Boomerangs don’t belong in Ireland. They belong in Australia.”

I approached the man at the meat counter and asked, “What’s with the boomerang?”

The man smiled and replied, “Well, what does a boomerang do when you throw it?”

I answered, "It comes back."

He said, "That's our job, to make you want to come back. Our jobs aren't just cutting meat, stocking bags, operating the till, or doing maintenance. Those are our individual tasks, but our job is the same. And that is, to make sure you come back. Cutting meat is just a task, something I do. What I am accountable for is the experience you have in our store. What can I do to make you want to come back?"

Interesting, why didn't I see these connections before? What can the schools do to make children want to be there?