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Title: Pack-Up the Beach House: It's time for a Leadership Refresher!

As we apply the last of our remaining sunscreen and take a final stroll along the beach, it's hard to believe the summer months are coming to a close. It wasn't long ago that we were planning our summer adventures, and now, we are busily preparing for the start of the school year and the remainder of 2015. As we pack up the beach house for another year, we are reminded once again how quickly time flies. The final days of summer, still with a little sand between our toes, represent a moment to reflect, recharge and reboot.

Reflection is critical in so many areas of our lives. It provides a much needed high-level view from which to lead effectively and strategically. As great leaders often do, I encourage you to find a quiet space to reflect upon the year thus far and the remaining months of 2015.

- Have you been flexing your style as you communicate/lead in varied environments?
- Have you sought feedback from others regarding your communication style and related observations?

If our leadership knowledge is not applied, we typically revert back to our natural style and neglect to grow beyond our comfort zone. It's in the flexing and agility that we find leaders and organizations going from good to great. It is in the reflection process that we also determine where progress is made and where blind-spots exist.

"Reflection is what links our performance to our potential. It is the process of properly unpacking ourselves as leaders for the good of others." - Colonel Eric Kail, West Point, 2015

Beyond self-reflection, it is equally critical to share feedback with your respective team/colleagues/organizational leadership. The ship won't steer itself, thus, a mid-year check-in is critical. During my volunteer hours, I dedicate time to our children's school. Recently, I was on the receiving end of exceedingly positive feedback regarding our oldest child's camp program. As a parent and a Board member of the school, I was thrilled to see overt praise and appreciation for the work of so many. However, I was immediately struck that those notified of the feedback were simply those that sat on the Board rather than those on the front-lines each day.

I contacted the President and encouraged him to "share the good, to support the great," and, just like a passing wave, the praise was forwarded, and the School leadership and staff received a tremendous boost of energy and motivation. The Board recognized the need to share the information with those on the front-lines each day. It's in these little moments that big opportunities sit before us.

For this month's article on leadership, I encourage you to consider the following exercise:

1) Make time

Reflection is about making time. A few ideas:

- *Remove the Noise:*
Turn off your electronics for four minutes. Sit in silence. Resist the urge to "do" something during this time. Just breathe; nothing more. Sometimes we need mental space, without an agenda, to create an opportunity for reflection.
- *Find the "Right" Time:*
Consider your most "self-aware" time of the day (morning/afternoon/evening before bed). Take that time to make a list of the areas that challenge and/or concern you, or simply revisit your Myers Briggs notes. Think about your leadership/communication style evolution. Be honest with yourself. What remains challenging? Is there a trend?
- *Take a Stroll:*
Get out of your normal routine. Shake up your day. Take a walk instead of a drive. Use that time to think about others' needs. What affirmation might they wish they knew? Blind-spots that may be holding them back? See something; say something.

2) Ask Questions

Reflection is about thinking. Asking probing or discerning questions helps our mind get into action mode. Consider using the list below as your "starter set" of reflective questions to help you think about the recent past in terms of your leadership and communication efforts of late or a specific event*.

- What worked? Why?
- What didn't work? Why?
- How can you leverage this experience?
- How does this experience relate to other situations you've encountered?
- Knowing what you know now, what would you do differently next time?
- Trending?

3) Think More Broadly

Resist the urge to apply your thinking to how you would react to the same scenario*, or how you might respond to a similar situation in the future. Our lives are too complex for that approach. Instead, think about what you can take from the respective event and apply it to other related, or perhaps even unrelated, situations. Look for generalizations, patterns and tendencies. When we think more broadly we make our reflection time infinitely more beneficial.

As for us, our little ones will soon trade their beach pail for a backpack full of books. The beach house, filled with so many memories, is closing its doors for the summer. We reflect lovingly on a wonderful summer, and we look forward to a new season ahead.