

## Leading in the Moment

You likely have seen the popular motivation posters that remind us that: “We don’t remember days, we remember moments.” An important idea, but what does this mean for leaders? If it is true that we can have a positive, lasting impact on others by creating intense, emotion-evoking moments, it makes sense for us to ask ourselves just how we are spending our leadership moments.

Reflect on all the interactions you have through the course of a day. How many of these are truly memorable? How many of these are making permanent marks on others? If you suspect that the number might be disappointingly low, you might want to consider shifting your approach in your day-to-day leadership activities. This is not that easy. There are a couple of problems to recognize and overcome.

First, as managers, we are encouraged, trained, and rewarded for being decisive and action-oriented. In many ways, our self-image is rooted in the idea that we distinguish ourselves as leaders by making things happen and making them happen now. Keep moving. Don’t stop. Time is money!

Second, our brains are literally teeming with self-talk about the complexity of running our organizations, surviving in the marketplace, and holding it all together: “Craft a winning strategy...call Jamie’s teacher...get ahead of the curve...remember your assistant’s birthday...exceed customer expectations...get that expense account in...lead organization change...renew the product line...call the vet...and fill the talent pipeline”. My head hurts just thinking about it. Paradoxically, all our time-saving tools that have created our high-energy, lightning-paced world have made all too rare those little slices of time that change people’s work, career, and life.

So how can leaders make the shift from the habit of trying to fix things and from the frenetic distractions of their many worlds (job, career, marketplace, family, friends, etc.) to the practice of making moments with others really matter, really count for something?

**Here are six practices and approaches that can make all the difference.**

1. **Before every conversation, be clear about your genuine intentions and your most ambitious expectations.** These two dimensions, working together, have an enormous influence on the success of your interactions. They are critical, not just to establish an accurate picture of your desired outcomes, but to shape the perceptions others have of you and the nature of your leadership. Clarity of intention and expectation inspires openness and attentiveness and sets the stage for wide-ranging, fertile dialogue.
2. **Get totally present with others, even if only for a few moments.** We often mistakenly blame our inability to be attentive to others on our frenetic schedules, when it is really our undisciplined brains that are the problem. We allow our minds to run nonstop internal stories we make up about the people, places, and things we encounter in our daily journeys. This habit dramatically impairs our ability to create an emotional

connection with others – our ability to get present with others, even for a few moments. Develop the mental capacity to turn off the multiple stories that are constantly running in your brain.

3. **Become an expert at genuine inquiry.** We live in times when deep reflection and thoughtfulness are often seen as indecisiveness. It is not about simply being open to learning. It is the practice of entering every conversation with the assumption that you are wrong to some degree and that you are highly motivated to correct this through the course of the conversation. People are drawn to conversations in which their insights and points of view are truly valued.
4. **Become seriously mindful.** There is a widespread misunderstanding of the term mindfulness. It is not about listening carefully to others, but rather about listening carefully to oneself. It is “the intentional, accepting and non-judgmental focus of one’s attention on the emotions, thoughts and sensations occurring in the present moment.” (Zgierska, 2009) Can you listen to yourself in the moment? Are you fully aware and accepting of your emotions, thoughts, and sensations? Can you bring yourself totally to a conversation with all your unique traits and characteristics? Mindfulness gives us the power to bring our whole selves into the conversation.
5. **Give voice to the one thing that needs to be said.** There is always one thing that needs to be said: some feedback, an insight, a word of encouragement, a fresh perspective. Get in the habit of “walking away empty.” Let your intuition and your intention be your guide. Say the one thing, in the moment, that you know will be of most help to the other person. With the best of intentions, Martin shared with me the one thing he thought I really needed to know. He gave voice to a huge blind spot, even though it was probably very difficult for him to do so, and with no motive other than helping me on my career journey.
6. **Always stand on the rock of your deepest beliefs and values.** One might think that the above five points are an exhortation to ignore or subordinate your own values, beliefs, and principles. Nothing could be further from the truth. Leading in the moment requires you to be clear on what is most important to you and by being true to those elements that give you the strength to do the above. As Maya Angelou stated so eloquently: “I have a certain way of being in this world, and I shall not, I shall not be moved.”

As a leader, you need to master key, future-focused practices such as visioning, strategic planning, and large-scale change, that help organizations thrive as they move forward. But what about the individuals you lead? Are you able to connect with them in the moment in a way that helps them make major shifts in their performance and careers? Do you care enough about the people in your organization to create moments that really matter?

Please note: these are game-changers in terms of your long-term leadership impact, however, they are not minor adjustments in your interpersonal style; they all require a deep commitment to changing yourself so that you can serve others in a more profound way.



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