

MAKING 'REFLECTION' A CORE LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

by Glenn Williams



Returning from a global leadership intensive with participants from Africa, Asia and the U.S, I couldn't help but notice how challenging it can be to invest adequate time reflecting on our current role, what has contributed to it the most, and what continues to shape the way we make decisions, set goals, and mobilize others.

By doing this we often overlook the significance of key connections and their importance to our success. Some of the other participants described the importance of this reflective experience –

"It's nice to look back at my journey and identify specific people and experiences that helped me become who I am now".

"Perhaps for the first time in thirty years, I stopped long enough to understand how my strengths as a leader impact those I lead – positively and negatively".

"I began to see a significant disconnect between what motivated me and what motivated other members of my team".

"I obviously need to refocus how I manage my relationships. I have tended to take my interpersonal skills for granted, but realise I need to be more intentional in building stronger connections with those I work with".

When we move immediately to the next thing on our list of priorities after concluding a meeting or project, it is often at the expense of examining whether or not things could have been done better; if the process could have been improved by including different people; or how it might have been possible to achieve a broader set of objectives longer-term. We mistakenly believe that a time of reflection equates to an unnecessary roadblock or pause.

Forrester argues that when organizations fail to incentivize reflection, they are setting themselves up to achieve the same result they didn't want in the first instance (Forrester, 2011). It is why Watkins encourages leaders to adopt a simple framework to help them accelerate their learning and adapt what they do next to what the situation requires (Watkins, 2003).

What's the bottom-line?

Foundational to good decision-making is making *reflection* a core practice of your leadership. It helps you to be more purposeful in exploring *how* things might be connected and its relevance to *what* needs to happen next. Below are some questions you might ask yourself –

- How does my experience affect the way I lead others? What have I learned from experiences that have impacted me negatively?
- When am I at my best? When is my team at their best?

- What could I have done differently or better to achieve the result I wanted? I may not have got the result I was after, but what important lessons did I learn?
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References

Forrester, Daniel Patrick. (2011). *Consider: Harnessing the Power of Reflective Thinking in Your Organization*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Watkins, Michael. (2003). *The First 90 Days: Critical Success Strategies for New Leaders at All Levels*. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press.

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