STOP, REFLECT, GO!

Leaders who pause to reflect reap benefits in a healthier work environment

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A year ago I was a brand new woman and was anxious about the development I thought I would be going through. I knew this change would be a necessary one for me to progress in my career. Reflecting on my personal growth and development, I thought it would be beneficial to take a step back and reflect on my past assignments so I could learn and grow.

REFLECTING AS A TEAM

While personal reflection has its benefits, team reflections have even greater power. Corporate culture guru Jason Tan feels that a reflective leader can more easily lead his or her team to spot issues and make the right moves, at the right time, to discuss and contemplate problems affecting specific employees or the organisation as a whole. This is because a reflective leader is more likely to walk into a meeting with good problem-solving skills. He might even notice to the symptoms of a disengaged employee, for example. Team members would appreciate the leadership because it not only helps increase productivity but also improves performance for the organisation.

Tan recalls a case in which a sales company he was coaching faced a 24% turnover in its sales force. The management team was shocked; no one knew how to cope with the problem. Upon reflection, the management team realised that while the organisation had performance measurement, the way in which they were measured caused their sales representatives to be impacted by sales.

Once that cause was identified, the team put in a matter of doing the right action to set things straight. The solution? Making the changes, which made it easier for the employees to perform. The remaining question, however, is what are the right steps to react to the crisis?

The answer is to slow us down but to give ourselves time to reflect on the past. As long as our work is an important part of our life, we need to pause and go back to our memory lane, think and reflect on the opportunities missed and what is important. Through team reflection, employees gain a better understanding of how their individual contributions affect organisational outcomes.

Reflection as a personal leadership competency

The reflection process can then diven team reflection sessions which can increase the number of activities that help boost the morale of the team. Here’s our Reflection Starter Kit to help you get started with your plans.

This can be customised to your needs and the nature of your business.

REFLECTION STARTER KIT

Reflection starter kit is not a one-size-fits-all solution to all the conflicts and challenges that we face in life. Rather, it’s a process that can be adapted to fit the needs of your team and organisation.

WAVE OF CAUTION

Be careful not to make a reflection session as an exercise. Evaluations are done with performance and results in mind. Reflections, however, are supposed to serve as a deep-analysis platform. Try to not expect results or specific answers as reflections are personal. Sharing can be encouraged in an intimate setting but not forced. Silence can be a winning indication that your session is working.

Self-reflection can be customised to catered in an activity that suits the individual. Google “self-reflection exercises” or “questions for leaders” and you will find many valuable links offering tips on the right questions to ask for the right answers. Engage your team, however, requires careful consideration and planning.

There are various ways in which leaders can engage their teams to reflect and move forward together so that the team grows together without leaving anyone behind. This includes activities, games, and just a set of questions they can answer or contemplate.

As with self-reflection, team reflection sessions give each team member the opportunity to recognise and learn from each other’s strengths, weaknesses, limitations, advantages and setbacks that he or she has faced at both personal and professional levels.

Leaders can design the personal reflection session to include relevant questions that will meet the goal of team building. Start– try and tested working models used worldwide include The Reflection Cycle, John M. Goleman, Model for Structured Reflection and Bartoll’s Development Framework.

What are the benefits of reflecting?

1. The reflective process can be done at any time and in any place.
2. It can be as simple as writing down your thoughts in a journal or notebook.
3. It can be done individually or with a group.
4. It can be done at any stage of your career – from the very beginning of your career to the end.

REFLECTION ON LEADERSHIP

WHAT IS A LEADER? A common definition is that it is someone who is motivated through experience and time.

It is often the case that leaders are individuals who are driven by vision, passion, and purpose. This is where the two worlds separate: what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger, and so on.

But when leaders start from academia or from somewhere else, one would wonder if the older ones even learn to see the world. After all, the very first creature we knew and understood was that of our parents or other leaders.

The best leader – Those who truly inspire and empower others through their own example – we find in their actions what true wisdom consists of: authentic reflection plus deliberate communication and constant learning.

Eric Kail, former course director at the Harvard Business School, once said, “I am a slow walker, but I never walk backward.” And so it is that we must walk forward to learn from our experiences.

Leaders must develop a habit of good reflection. It is an essential component of leadership development and an important element of personal growth. As we develop a habit of reflection, we develop a habit of learning.

In conclusion

Begin with clearly defined parameters to maintain focus instead of starting off with just any old questions. These parameters can range from reflecting on aspects of communication, leadership-building to the outcomes of your career.

But while it may be difficult to cultivate the qualities of a reflective leader in the first few years, it gets easier – not to mention beneficial – with experience. And this is how it should be: through experience, we gain the wisdom to reflect. As with any other skill, reflection becomes a natural process for you as you gain experience.

And the best way to ensure that you will always have this opportunity (including while dealing with disagreements) is to learn more about it and practice it. Even future leaders should always be prepared to learn how to deal with situations that arise where a leader is reflective.