

Leaders need REST

Last month, I shared about the Leader and His family. This month, I would like to share how leaders should self-care to lead for the long haul.

In his landmark book, “*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*”ⁱ, Stephen Covey underscores a principle for successful executives: “Don’t kill the goose that lays the golden eggs.” Too often, we are so concerned about laying golden eggs, we neglect to take care of the goose. We pressurize it to produce. We over-work it. Sometimes, in our frantic desire to over-achieve, we kill it. Alas, we need to take care of ourselves.

We need to practice the **REST** principle in leadership.

Reflect: Take strategic pauses.

Take time to think about life, family, and ministry. Running fast is no guarantee of running in the right direction. That requires us to make strategic pauses in our personal and organizational life. So often we push and drive ourselves so hard, we forget to reflect on where we are going and how we are doing. Ronald Heifetzⁱⁱ, Director of Leadership Education Project at Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, writes: “Leaders need a sanctuary, a place where they can go to get back in touch with their worth of their life and the worth of their work.” He warns: “To stay alive as leaders – to tend the wounds that we inevitably receive when we raise tough questions – requires maintaining these structures in our lives.” We may drive ourselves hard but in the wrong direction!

Enjoy: Celebrate Success.

Many CEOs feel guilty enjoying success. Inability to enjoy success, taste the ‘spoils of our victory’ will not only rob us the joy of working but the joy of life. Soon, we will run ourselves dry. Celebrating success is another way of affirming our team who has worked long and hard. It need not be in monetary term. Just giving them a break, buying them a meal, or having a celebrative tea-session does a lot to the morale. It is also another way of instilling fun back into work and life, which is critical for long-term survival.

Serve people: People before program.

Jim Collins, in his latest book, “Good to Great” calls this the “Who First..Then What” principleⁱⁱⁱ. In his landmark studies, Collins found that great leaders not only have the will to succeed but they are humble and self-effacing. Cultivating a spirit of servanthood and humility is crucial to help us and others find fulfillment. Great leaders attribute success to others but take personal responsibility for failures. Ego-centric leaders do the opposite. This spirit demands a commitment to develop people to their fullest potential

Temper emotions: Practice self-leadership.

Great leaders go beyond self-awareness to self-management. Some leaders are conscious of themselves, their personalities, idiosyncrasies, motivations and competencies but they cannot manage themselves. They lack self-control, lose their cool, become unusually critical, behave inappropriately, want to do everything and unable to keep their pride in check. Bill Hybels, a noted leader, “The toughest management challenge is always yourself.”^{iv} Dee Hock, writing about leadership for over 20 years and a laureate in the Business Hall of Fame, shares this wisdom, “We should invest 50% of our leadership amperage in self-leadership and the remaining 50% should be divided into leading down, leading up and leading laterally.”^v Here’s what Daniel Goleman, author of the best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence*, has to say, “Exceptional leaders distinguish themselves because of superior self-leadership.”^{vi} I cannot agree more.

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ⁱ Covey, S.R. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Simon & Schuster. 1989.

ⁱⁱ Taylor, W.C. *The Leader of the Future*. Fast Company. 2001.

ⁱⁱⁱ Collins, James. *Good to Great*. Harper & Row. 2001

^{iv} Hybels, Bill, *Self-Leadership*. Christianity Today, 2001.

^v Hybels, Bill, *Self-Leadership*. Christianity Today, 2001.

^{vi} Hybels, Bill, *Self-Leadership*. Christianity Today, 2001.