

Prepackaged Leadership

A few days ago, I was reading an interview with James Hackett, the CEO of Steelcase. When he was asked about his most memorable leadership lessons, he spoke of the importance of becoming a leader that was not 'prepackaged'. In the course of his work, he met many CEOs and he noticed that the ones who were truly impactful, truly leaders in every sense of the word, were those who were not 'prepackaged'. The great leaders were those who exhibited a 'sense of peace, this self-awareness, that says, 'I understand who I am'.

I was touched by his words and how strongly they resonated with my experiences over the past 25 years. On its face, the invitation to be self-aware and to embody our authenticity in the workplace seems simple. But the realities of evolving into a leadership role can present many enticing moments to be like someone else, to ignore that gut feeling and step away from what is deeply held as our values, our ethics. There are the 'unwritten rules' of the organization, the stories about the need to 'manage up', the pressures of meeting this quarters' numbers, the calls to 'do something' even when patience is the better course, and the statements about what 'everyone' is doing in the marketplace as justification for actions that are 'gray'. It takes strength and courage to stand in 'who I am' at moments like this. But when we don't, a little piece of us is lost forever.

The journey to know who we really are is sometimes long, and often surprising. It can begin with a couple of simple questions. What are my leadership principles? What are those values that are my rudder in the midst of the storms? When we were on retreat, some of us explored this question as a reflection. We sat quietly, allowed the body and mind to settle into the present, and then simply noticed what arose when we asked ourselves the questions. The reflexive answers were put aside, and we continued to notice what else arose in the stillness. We were often surprised by what arose.

And, once we have a better understanding and connection with our principles and values, we can ask ourselves 'what do we notice when our actions as leaders do not align with these principles'?

If you care to, give this reflection a try this week, what did you discover?

Have a safe and restful weekend.

Warm regards

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