

After the Program: Going It Alone

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One can only hope that when people emerge from a leadership development program they feel proud and accomplished. At best, they will recognize a change (for the better) in themselves, at worst they will have gained some tools they will be able to use in the future.

At the conclusion of a program, however, there is always the question: What now? Leadership competence is always a work in progress; a dynamic learning system that has to keep moving and growing. Like a garden, it will need tending to grow. It will need to be protected from distraction (weeded) and nurtured with thoughtful care (watered).

The first order of business to weed and water your inner leader is to designate a time to reflect. Winston Churchill, at the peak of Britain's crisis during WWII, took an hour each day to rest and reflect. You may not have the luxury of an hour a day, but you can certainly find time each week. Try attaching your reflection time to something you already do—the Monday morning dog walk, the Wednesday evening commute. Designate a half hour of time as a cell phone-free, computer-free zone, and think about one of three things:

1. In the past few days, have I had the impact that I intended with my team, my peers, and my clients?
2. Are my actions aligned with my stated values?
3. What will my legacy be with this project, team, business, company?

Intent and Impact:

When people become leaders, they give up the right to be ignorant of the impact they have on others. Being aware of impact is simply part of the job description because leading entails getting things done through others. These “others” are critically important to your success. Tone of voice, choice of words, and timing of delivery all contribute to impact—pay attention to the effect you have. If you have an effect you did not intend, do not ignore it and move on. Instead, stop and say: “I seem to have caused some confusion, how can we clear this up?” The more you take the time to address a gap between what you intended and the impact you actually make up front, the more time and aggravation you save down the road.

Values Alignment:

Nothing erodes credibility as quickly as actions that belie words. So many of us have had leaders who say that certain things are important but then take actions that don't reflect what they have said. Ask yourself: Do I say what I mean? Do I do as I say? Am I a role model for what I expect from my team?

Legacy:

Leadership is a hard and lonely job. It is a leader's job to articulate a compelling vision, to shape culture, and to hold people accountable to behaviors that will contribute positively to the culture. Every organization or team will be shaped by their leader. How are you shaping your organization or team? What impact are you making that will last after you have gone? What are your people learning from you? Think about the immediate ripple effect and the potential long-term effect of the decisions you are making right now. Ask yourself: What will my legacy be?

Reflection is not natural for some, so to augment the chance that you will continue to work on your leadership garden it can work well to engage other gardeners.

- If you are a gregarious person who learns by talking out loud, find a buddy coach—one who has been through the program with you. Set up a regular conversation, perhaps lunch, once every two weeks for the sole purpose of discussing the topics above.
- The avid reader and natural student of leadership might try another tactic—set up a book group with people you respect in the company. Once a quarter, read a book about a great leader and have a discussion about what makes them great and what you can emulate.
- Engage your team or direct reports in your growth efforts. It takes courage to share your development goals with them and ask for feedback on how you are doing. Their insights might surprise you.

You have already made a considerable investment in your own growth—you have planned and laid the groundwork—prepared the soil and planted the seeds. With just a little day-to-day attention and care, you will deepen and broaden your leadership capabilities. Create a garden that continues to flourish. Plant intentionally. Reap what you sow. Look back in five years and you may be astonished at what you have accomplished!



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