



THE Learning Advantage

Mobley's Musings: Time to Reflect, Reframe, Renew

Some of my clients had significant time off during the height of the COVID pandemic. As they returned to work, most told me they felt more relaxed and grounded. Small things didn't bother them as much. They had a more long-term perspective. Instead of obsessing over tactical issues, they were able to focus on what really mattered. Others recalled the pre-pandemic coaching conversations we'd had and considered them in a new light. With a more balanced mindset, they were able to make the changes they had talked about but hadn't had the time or energy to pursue.

Short of another pandemic lockdown, how can we give ourselves the time and space to review our priorities and refocus on what matters? Weekends and vacations are packed with have-to-do's and want-to-do's, leaving few opportunities for deep reflection. When you're running as fast as you can on the hamster wheel it's hard to figure out how to jump off.

Many organizations have recognized the importance of time off and are providing more in employee benefits packages. Rather than use all your free time for vacations or staycations devoted to working on your house and yard, consider taking some unprogrammed time off to reflect. Time spent without a "deliverable" in mind may provide the insight and space to focus on what matters.

Sandy



Ask Sandy

Broaden Your Mentors

Several clients have expressed concern over lost opportunities when their mentors fell out of favor or left their organization. Having little or no relationship with the new leadership, they felt passed over for important jobs in favor of people the leaders knew and trusted.

Their concerns are well-founded. In his book, *High Flyers*, author Morgan W. McCall Jr. with the Center for Creative Leadership discusses the qualities of successful executives. In his research, he examined top performers who were expected to move up the organization but who had hit a wall. He identifies ten reasons for such career "derailment," including overreliance on a particular boss or mentor and linking their career to that person's success.

How can you build a broader network and reduce your dependence on one person? Ask your mentor to introduce you to the other people they mentor as well as leaders in their own network. Establishing relationships with people from other departments within the organization is especially helpful in extending and strengthening your network.

One client had a mentor in another part of the organization whom her boss disliked and avoided. As a result of her boss's animosity, any projects that required working with the other team were closed to her. But through her mentor, she was able to create bridges to the other organization and develop a better working relationship. Her boss recognized the value she brought and appreciated that she could collaborate with the other organization on projects that he had been unable or unwilling to undertake.

With a broader network, you will be in a better position when your mentor leaves the organization. But be sure to stay in touch because their interest and ability to help you may not end with their departure. They may join an organization you're interested in, or if they've retired they might join corporate boards. In fact, your mentor may have insights and perspectives to share that they hadn't considered when they were part of the organization.

Learning for Leaders: Ask your mentors to introduce you to other leaders so that your career isn't dependent on just one person.

Coaches Corner: When your clients identify their mentors and supporters, ask them how broad their influence is in the entire organization.

If you have questions, you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to sandy@learningadvantageinc.com



Decision-Making Flaws and Fixes

Many times I've observed leadership teams trying to decide where to focus support and funding among several projects and opportunities. Leaders typically advocate for their favorite projects, explaining the benefits and projected return on investment. Rarely will that person describe the risks or provide a fair comparison to competing ideas. Recognizing that everyone has their pet projects, the team struggles to decide which to pursue.

The classic approach is to list the pros and cons of each project. But since the leaders tend to be biased, they're reluctant to point out flaws in their favorites. And the leaders typically don't know enough about others' projects to objectively assess them.

In his 1990 book *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge points out the inherent flaws when people advocate for an idea. He says that when we are in advocacy mode it is hard to be curious, objective, and open to others' points of view. This is even more difficult when we're under time pressures to decide. According to Senge, taking a posture of inquiry instead of advocacy leads to better decision-making.

Based on Senge's insights and my own experience, I offer these tips for better decision-making:

1. Don't make decisions at the same meeting where people are promoting their ideas. It is difficult to be impartial after promoting your idea. Separate the meetings and be clear that the first meeting is for explaining the opportunities while decisions will be made in a follow-up meeting.
2. Task two or three leaders to research the opportunities raised. When they've had time to study the project more deeply, their findings will be less biased, which can increase support.
3. Ask team members to assume roles when evaluating the projects — such as CEO, board member, customer, or employee — and provide feedback from the perspective of that role. Using this approach, team members are often more willing to give critical feedback than they would be if they were representing themselves.

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