



On Leadership

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‘Did Anyone Tell You How Great You Are Today?’

To sod or to seed—that is the question. Years ago, when we bought our first house, we put in a new lawn. Even though I had no idea how, I decided to do it myself: clearing out the weeds, putting in pipes and sprinklers, spreading fertilizer and grass seed, then watering every day.

Each morning as I left for work, I’d look at that barren dirt and wonder if anything was ever going to happen. Day after day, I was bummed out. But as is true with so many things, even when it looks

like there isn’t much progress externally, a lot of progress is happening below the surface. And then I saw it.

As I drove out of the driveway one morning, I noticed something. I got out of the car, leaned over, and—sure enough—

there were the first tiny green sprouts. The next morning, more green shoots. Then, before long, we had a lush lawn. Just looking at it gave me a feeling of accomplishment and achievement.

Flash-forward several years later, when we

moved into another house. This time I wasn’t going to go through the impatient agony of waiting for the seed, so I invested in sod. It was heavy for me to roll out, but it was quick. By the afternoon—voila!—I had a brand-new lawn.

Then I went outside the next morning. Instead of entering Shangri-La, I encountered a muddy mess. Our dog had dug up at least a quarter of that sod. Those big puppy eyes gave me a cynical look as if to say, “You should have known better than to take a shortcut.”

Lesson learned. Sod is instant gratification. Seed is an investment over time. And sowing seed is exactly what we all should be doing these days to make sure our grass is greener—or else risk losing the people who helped get us here. That seed is appreciation.

An executive shared a story with me recently of her 92-year-old grandfather, who made it a habit to deliver a heartfelt message to everyone who made a difference in his life—whether family



members, friends, or someone who served him at the local diner: “Did anyone tell you how great you are today?”

“I’ve heard this line thousands of times,” the executive told me. “Yet it still snaps me out of whatever mindset I am in and humbles me into a simpler state of mind—of being loved and seen.”

People everywhere hunger to be seen—to feel valued, especially now. They want to be noticed and acknowledged. Who would disagree with that? But, if we’re honest, the challenge for some leaders is the big disconnect—the broken bridge between knowing and doing. Here are some thoughts:

Words motivate, actions activate.

Many years ago, early in my tenure as CEO, I went to New York to meet with a board member to go over the feedback of my 360-degree review. At the end of our three-hour conversation, that board member gave me invaluable advice that has guided me ever since: “Never forget that your job is to make people feel better after every conversation than they did before.” I certainly don’t always live

up to that standard, but sowing the seeds of appreciation starts with words. *Thank you. You’re making a difference. You matter.* But the greener grass is cultivated by actions—making an investment in truly seeing others—and in the development and advancement of others.

Put me in, coach.

There is no better compliment for anyone—whether a coach or a leader—than having someone want to play for them. All of us need to create a “put me in, coach” culture where people want to step up and be on our teams. Earning that kind of trust takes time and effort, especially when people are physically separated and without the happenstance interactions that would frequently bring them together.

Even though many of us are still isolated, we have to overcome making it isolating. We each yearn to be part of something bigger than ourselves—we all want to be valued, to be appreciated, to be recognized. We want to be that seed that becomes part of a gorgeous green pasture. If we don’t know what to say, we can try this with sincerity: “Did anyone tell you how great you are today?” ■

Illustration: Richard Montoya