Day 4: Leading from Home - Communications

Ding! Brrrp. Whistle, ring.

Pop-up, peek-out, flash, banner!

Communications clutter may be one of the most insidious and damaging aspects of work, both in the professional and home environments.

Uncluttered communications look like this:
- You are unavailable when you are doing work that requires focus and reflection.
- You are unavailable when you are present with another person.
- You resist temptations to check communications when you are engaged in either of the above.
- When unavailable, all of your communication alerts are off (hidden and silenced).

If you routinely practice these habits, great! If you don't, keep reading.

Remember there are three overarching themes for the week:
- Make intentional decisions
- Limit distractions and transitions
- Engage fully (and healthily)

Communications clutter undermines every one of those themes!

If you agree that the three themes are important, then why would you maintain poor communications hygiene? There are three possible explanations:
- You haven't thought about it.
- You don't know how to unclutter.
- Choosing to be unavailable is not a luxury you can afford.

Let's look at each one of these.

Haven't thought about it. Now you have!

Don't know how to unclutter.
- Prior to beginning work or a meeting that requires your full focus, disable all notifications (except reminders such as calendar events).
- Alert others that you will be unavailable.
- Condition others to avoid distracting you as much as possible. Teach them why distractions hurt your leadership. Communicate your schedule so they know when you will be available.
- Establish a procedure for how others should approach you when you are working. This is especially important if you have children and are working from home.

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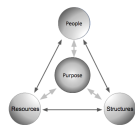
- o For example, teach kids to "knock, enter, wait." The knock notifies and prevents the startle reflex, stepping in and waiting allows you to finish your thought and create a smoother transition. In a shared space the equivalent of knocking is to stand at the edge of your office space (in your peripheral vision).
  - o Note that an added benefit of such a procedure is that it cues you to make a clean break from your work and be fully present with the other person.
- Establish procedures for true emergency communications:
  - o Designate a few specific people who have the power to intrude.
  - o Teach them what constitutes an emergency.
  - o Enable communication from only them (e.g., enable the two calls in a row feature on your phone for those individuals).

Note: I'm laughing hilariously as I write this as the lawn person has come and is mowing right beneath my window! Add that to the list of intruding distractions!

Being unavailable is an unavoidable luxury. That is certainly possible, but perhaps you have created a false story around the importance of being available 90-100% of the time. Remember that one of our key themes is to be intentional, so please reflect on the following.

Maybe the real problem lies within us, and the narrative we have constructed around our own leadership. Let's briefly unpack a couple of the stories we may have constructed for ourselves. Under each story, I'll offer some alternative thoughts and perspectives. You don't need to agree with me, just reflect so that you can do so *intentionally*.

Narratives:
- I need to be available 24/7 for emergencies
  - o What constitutes an emergency?
  - o Who decides it is an emergency?
  - o Who is allowed to interrupt you with an emergency?
  - o What would happen if you were sick or unavailable?
  - o Why does it have to be you?
  - o What processes can you put in place to make sure that you are only interrupted by *true* emergencies?
- My availability demonstrates my priorities
  - o Does this mean that responding to communication is the top priority?
  - o What is the effect on quality if availability is more important than work?
  - o How do you engage in strategic work if you are always available?
  - o What does 24/7 availability say about the value of your time?
- My response time shows I am conscientious and dedicated
  - o If you only responded every two hours, would that mean you were less dedicated and less capable?
  - o How do you measure your own success?
  - o How do others measure your success?
  - o Are you evaluating other the same way, on their communication timeliness as opposed to organizational outcomes?

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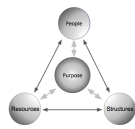
- I need to know what's going on
    - Why?
    - If you have capable people, why do you need to continually monitor their progress?
    - What impact on their productivity does your monitoring have?
    - What impact on their willingness to take risks or resolve their own internal conflicts?
    - Are you micro-managing?
    - If you don't have capable people, what are you going to do about it?

Again, you don't need to embrace all or any of these points, but I hope you will reflect on them and be intentional about what you accept and reject.

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