



What an amazing 60th birthday celebration I have had! The joy of meeting with our grown up kids and their spouses from around the world and receiving so many birthday wishes and affirmations from my YWAM family have been overwhelming. I feel humbled, encouraged, blessed and privileged to have been able to serve in the mission for these 38 years with such a wonderful bunch of people. I have been surrounded by such teachable, open hearted, inspiring and adventurous people, that it has definitely been a taste of heaven. When I think of all the challenging situations others have had to face, I feel like I have had a 'walk in the park' in comparison. Thank you for your kind thoughtful words and offerings.

As I reflect on the last two weeks and all the positive experiences and warmth of expressions I have received, it makes me realise how important the relational side of our leadership really is. I feel valued, trusted and honoured.

Over my birthday celebration, my attention was aroused as I read a book by Simon Sinek. He writes, "If you watch Marines line up for their food in the mess hall, the most junior eat first, followed in rank order, with the leaders eating last. They view the responsibility of the leader is to look out for the well being of the rest of their team." The book is called, "Leaders eat last."

Sinek goes on to say, "Whereas many people think leadership is about rank, power and privilege, Marines believe that true leadership is the willingness to place others' needs above your own. Exceptional organizations, prioritize the well-being of their people and, in return, their people give everything they've got to protect and advance the well-being of one another and the organization." His statement sounds like it comes straight from Philippians 2 doesn't it – *in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others!*

Marines believe the key ingredient in their team life is *empathy*. It is empathy that enables them to trust each other with their very lives. It struck me as interesting because the word *empathy* doesn't immediately come to my mind when thinking of the marines. They are made up of tightly knit task force units who move behind enemy lines to do damage as quickly and effectively as possible. We think of words like disciplined, hard-core, dedicated, committed, decisive, strategic... but not really empathetic. However for each team to function well it requires a high level of trust and that trust comes from the empathy for one another.

Empathy: the ability to identify with and understand somebody else's feelings or difficulties

In the marines, they have great tools at hand, incredible technology, and sophisticated systems yet they claim that their single greatest asset to do their job is empathy! Ask any of them – why did you risk your life to save your teammate? The answer comes back, "Because they would have done the

same for me!” When the foundation is laid for strong bonds of relationship to be made, success and fulfilment are possible that no amounts of money, fame or awards can buy.

I was talking with my son John recently who had started a new job. He was pleasantly surprised at the longevity of the staff in the company and then began to understand as he related with his new boss: His boss leads with a people first style. He was being oriented into the job and no expense was spared. The first week the boss took him out for lunch almost everyday to check how things were going and to see if any problems had arisen. After a month as a bonus to the managers for such hard work, he took them all on a helicopter ride to a vineyard for a wine tasting experience and out to a plush restaurant for a relational chat with the team. One Friday a month he takes all the staff out for drinks and food and the company picks up the tab and he encouraged John to do the same for his staff. As he was returning from holiday, his boss called to say, I know you will be jetlagged so take an extra day off. Then on the day he returned he took him out for lunch to catch him up with what he had missed while away. What an amazing people first style of management. This is definitely not the norm!

We are just starting another LDC here in Malaga, and the staff are arriving as I write this paragraph. Each year the team changes but we experience the same depth of relationship, servant attitude, willingness to take on any task and work together to bless all the leaders attending from around the world.

Part of the reason for people giving their all is that they are included, valued, given opportunity to use their gifts, encouraged to step out and try new things and feel believed in. I have worked with LDC teams all around the world and they all function this way, which leads me to the conclusion that if you create the right environment of inclusiveness, value and belief, anything is possible. I loved this next story of a business and how it was turned around by putting people first.

An American struggling company was bought up by Bob Chapman, who believed employees were people and not just factory workers. This is what he found as he chatted with the workers: Factory workers were treated differently, they felt like their freedom was taken away, they clocked in and clocked out, they responded to bells for taking breaks, had to ask permission to make calls home and they didn't feel trusted by the management. So Chapman made changes. Without big announcements, the clocks were taken away, no permission was needed for breaks, no lining up for checking out machine parts was necessary (initiated to stop theft) and calls home were made free. Chapman understood that to earn the trust of people, the leaders must first treat them like people. To earn trust, he must extend trust. By simply changing the environment in which the people worked, the people started acting differently toward each other. If certain conditions are met and the people inside an organisation feel safe among each other, they will work together to achieve things none of them could have ever achieved alone.

Unfortunately this kind of leadership is the exception in the workplace. 80% of people in the U.S. are dissatisfied with their jobs, according to the Deloitte shift index.

The orientation for the marines is tough but the mantra that is branded into the group is: “from this day on, words like I, me, my will no longer be in your vocabulary. They will be replaced with words like we, together and us.”

In our teams and ministry we need to create what Sinek calls, “The circle of safety.” The terminology fits right in with what the Lord is saying to us as a mission about circles. Each of our circle teams should be places of safety, where people are free to share, be honest and open and know they will be supported whatever is happening.

As Jesus made breakfast for his disciples after his resurrection, he didn't rebuke them for their fear and unbelief during the crucifixion. He opened his heart to them and created a circle of safety and trust. Jesus didn't have a plan B – they were it, and he trusted them to follow through.

An Aesop fable from the sixth century B.C. also relates to a circle of safety: A lion used to prowl about a field in which four oxen used to dwell. Many a time he tried to attack them; but whenever he came near they turned their tails to one another, so that whichever way he approached them he was met by the horns of one of them. At last, however they fell a quarrelling among themselves and each went off to pasture alone in a separate corner of the field. Then the lion attacked them one by one and soon made an end of all four.

Intimidation, humiliation, isolation, feeling insignificant, feeling useless and rejection are all stresses we try to avoid inside the organisation. But the danger inside is controllable and it should be the goal of leadership to set a culture free of danger from each other. And the way to do that is by giving people a sense of belonging, by showing empathy, being sensitive and understanding of people, having a relational approach to decision making, taking people into account and not treating them as numbers or cogs in the machine.

Stress and anxiety at work have less to do with the work we do and more to do with weak management and leadership. When we know that there are people at work who care about how we feel, our stress levels decrease. According to a Gallup poll in 2013 called state of the American workplace, “when our bosses completely ignore us, 40% of us actively disengage from our work. If our bosses recognise just one of our strengths and reward us for doing what we're good at, only 1% of us actively disengage from the work we're expected to do.

The Whitehall studies: Researchers found that it is not the demands of the job that cause the most stress, but the degree of control workers feel they have throughout their day. The studies also found that the effort required by a job is not in itself stressful, but rather the imbalance between the effort we give and the reward we feel. The lower someone's rank in the organisational

hierarchy, the greater their risk of stress-related health problems, not the other way around.

Back to the question we started with. Do you as a leader eat last? How aware are you of the wellness of your staff? What is your understanding of their passions and motivations? How approachable are you as a leader to your staff, tested by the ease by which they share with you? How empathetic would you say you are in your leadership style? For the marines it's an essential element, I think it should be no less for us as mission leaders.

Until next month

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