
You win a few. You lose a few. Some get rained out. But you dress for all of them." » Satchel Paige

Going Forward, Looking Back

I had a chance this month to grab dinner with friends I worked with about twenty years ago.

During our reminiscing and laughing session, I was reminded that events that were anything but funny in the moment often bring big laughs now.

In fact, some of the more stressful events of the past make for some of the most humorous stories today.

One of my favorite soapbox topics over the years has been reminding folks that stress and anxiety weren't invented this week.

It's just that the things we are dealing with in the present are...get this... in the present and top-of-mind.

It can often seem that our days consist entirely of dealing with challenge after challenge after challenge.

But I ask folks to think back to various times in their personal and professional lives. I've yet to find a person who can't think of times in their past in which they felt overwhelmed, or anxious, or even depressed.

Heck, some folks just read that list and thought, "We call that 'Tuesday' around here."

Now, remembering we've overcome many challenges and faced stressful times before does not necessarily lessen today's challenges.

It can, however, help us keep things in perspective.

Coach Beyond the Score

A recent conversation with the HR director of a community bank found us discussing a common management challenge.

There is a tendency to look at the final score of a competition and judge a team's performance strictly by the numbers.

If they won the game, they performed well. If they didn't, well... they likely didn't.

If you produced impressive individual statistics, you were a star performer. If you didn't, well... you likely weren't.

Yet, veteran leaders who have coached sports teams and business teams alike realize that things aren't always as cut and dried as that.

For instance, two branch managers can have the same title, work for the same operation, and have the same level of corporate support.

On paper, you'd think comparing their results would be an apples-to-apples proposition.

Sometimes, it is. Just as often, however, it's not.

Folks can be on the same team but competing on very different playing fields. The level of competition from market to market and even neighborhood to neighborhood can vary greatly.

The levels of existing brand awareness and brand preference managers inherit can be similarly diverse from market to market.

Chances are, we didn't suddenly become inept. In fact, as we progress in and/or even change careers, new levels of responsibility and bigger opportunities tend to come our way.

Opportunities frequently come with just a bit of pressure and anxiousness, as well. (It's a package deal.)

Progress in our personal and professional lives involves dealing with new (and recurring) challenges and overcoming setbacks on our paths.

We then tend to look back fondly on the past – on the good old days – because they are safe. They happened already and you know the outcome.

In fact, many underplay how difficult some of the things they've handled were. That's human nature.

Obstacles in our career (and life) rear-view mirrors appear smaller as the years pass.

Beyond that, it's helpful to realize how many times the things that didn't work out for you in the moment wound up working out for you in the end.

The experiences gained and lessons learned from one disappointment end up being the key to capitalizing on future opportunities.

Some of those opportunities are in front of you today. And you're ready for them.

It's your move.

In short, it is quite possible for a manager and team to be putting in noteworthy efforts yet have lesser results to show in a given period of time than their peers.

And as I make that point, I realize there are some who think that sounds like excuse making.

That's not the case, and I'm not suggesting that "the numbers" don't matter. They do.

The truest measure over time of how good we are at our jobs is whether we are growing whatever portion of a business is entrusted to us.

That said, it's hard to financially incentivize even noteworthy efforts when business results aren't where they need to be.

That's simply a fact of life.

It's not as hard, however, to actively acknowledge and encourage managers and teams who keep tough markets and situations from becoming dire ones.

Engaged leaders (at all levels) acknowledge their current top performers, while striving to ensure future top performers remain in the game.

They will not let good people become discouraged or look to jump ship too quickly when results have not caught up to efforts just yet.

Whatever the current score, strive to keep your good people in the game.

"Listen to what you know instead of what you fear." » Richard Bach

Dave Martin, author of The In-Store Advantage, has become one of the most prolific writers in the banking industry. His keynote presentations, seminars, and podcasts have an authenticity and humor that brings teams of all sizes and seniority levels together.

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