HARNESS YOUR POWER BY PLAYING TO YOUR STRENGTHS

By Dr. Connie S. Newsome

***Headline****: Leaders, live a life of impact through greater self-awareness.*

***Teaser****: When you ask yourself a question requiring great transparency, be ready for the answer.*

On November 03, 2021, I reached the age of 50 years old, one-half of a century! That was HUGE for me! I was excited, grateful, expectant...and curious. “Hmmm, what are some steps I can take to empower myself and have my remaining years be both enjoyable and impactful?” Then I said, “Self, what is the one, initial step you can take?” *Myself* answered, “Become more self-aware.” Alrighty then, here we go!

# SOME WIDELY APPLICABLE OBSERVATIONS

# I want to play to my strengths:

I am tired of focusing on what I cannot do or my weaknesses. I want to put my best foot forward, daily. Well guess what, beloved? Performance of tasks for which there is neither talent nor skill breeds ineffectiveness. Generally, as leaders, we have too much time and responsibilities on our plates to waste time being ineffective. In my early years of learning and observing leadership lessons, I saw the principle of *playing to your strengths* with a former manager. She, by nature, was not what you would think of as a “cuddly” person, though she loved people, and she enjoyed being in leadership. She had a growing team and she wanted them to feel appreciated. She asked, among the team, who would like to be responsible for remembering and recognizing birthdays, pulling together appropriate socials, etc. Of course, there was one jovial lovie who was willing to be that team member (it was not me). I learned then that there are numerous ways to let your team members so shine their light without dimming yours one bit. Usually, it is work related but sometimes, it is not. It can, however, be equally important if the difference one makes impacts morale, which impacts efficiency, productivity, attendance, and so on. I also learned early on that it is absolutely OK to empower others on my team. There can be more than one winner.

**I must demonstrate patience:**

As leaders, we tend to be impatient, for we want our team members, comrades, whomever, to move as fast as we are moving to implement our vision, get trained and productive, and etc. I learned from Dr. John C. Maxwell that if we are impatient with our team members, we may grow to resent them instead of encouraging them to come along with us on our journey. That, my friends, makes us ineffective leaders. Obviously, we want to limit our instances of ineffectiveness.

**I have to extend grace:**

*“You got 15 minutes.”*

I have an uncle who did not want to be in management, but his skill and work ethic placed him there.... for decades. 😜👏 He recently shared the system he developed for team members who wanted to be defiant or argumentative. He would tell them, “You’ve got 15 minutes to decide whether you want to go home without pay or do the job you have been asked to do. Think about it and let me know.” It was an honest window and an allowed time of reflection and decision. It gave them both the space they needed to breathe. Most of the time, the team member chose to resume working. I love it! Thanks for sharing, Uncle Gary!

**I can still “win” while supporting/mentoring:**

We want to win (finish a project successfully, implement a money or time-saving process, or etc.) but we should always want to win with our team by our side, not sitting on the sidelines feeling forgotten or unimportant. Remember, on our journey to our mountaintop, we reach down and pull others up to succeed with us.

I keep in mind the truths about engagement, as shared by Patrick Lencioni:

Empower yourself and your team members by avoiding the three signs of a miserable job: Anonymity, Irrelevance, and Immeasurability. Ensure your team members feel known. Ensure they understand the importance of the work they do and how it fits into the larger picture of the organization. Ensure they know how the organization measures of quantifies their work.

**Intentional growth:**

Be about intentional growth and intentional about learning. Rick Warren, author of The Purpose Driven Life, shares that “The moment you stop learning is the moment you stop leading.”

In closing, I will share some of my takeaways after introspection and becoming more self-aware:

* I love myself and other people. We are all beloveds!
* I am more fulfilled when I focus less on my weaknesses (opportunities for improvement) and focus more on my strengths and how I can use them to be effective.
* Aging is not to be looked upon unfavorably. It is [simply the number of years the world has been enjoying my existence.](https://justbinspired.com/our-cards/age-is-merely-the-number-of-years-the-world-has-been-enjoying-you/)
* It is important to keep laughing, especially for those of us who are serious minded.
* It would be to my benefit to work out more consistently (I know, I know).
* I love encouraging and exhorting others. I could read and study more so I would have a plethora of material to benefit whoever I speak to, but while I am growing in that space, I remain confident that exhortation is a strength, and I should not discount it.

Thomas J. Watson wrote: Nothing so conclusively proves a man’s ability to lead others as what he does from day to day to lead himself.” <https://libquotes.com/thomas-j-watson/quote/lbu9p7k>

Beloveds, I hope that you give yourselves grace to genuinely love who you are as leaders, space to grow, and breadth to embrace others during your progress. Do take good, diligent care.