

J. Michael Locke

Musings

#11: Be Authentic and Personal April 2, 2020

I want to highlight that much of what I share I've learned from Robert E. King over the last twenty years. Bob's track record in building businesses is unparalleled and like many who receive this email, he taught me (and continues to) every day. Leading and building an organization is an art form. Can't teach it in school. You need to learn the craft from others. Hopefully, I am contributing to that effort with these musings.

By definition of their role, leaders can be intimidating. They have power and authority. Even if you don't realize it, you are intimidating. One way to reduce this intimidation is to be open and personal. Show your vulnerability. Laugh about a time when you messed up or failed. Use your children's names in conversation or share your questionable attempt to film a TikTok video. Open up your home and invite people to come over for a company event.

One interesting byproduct of the current remote "work from home environment" is we are getting a peek at everyone's home. Position yourself with thought about what is behind you in your videocall – pictures of kids or something you enjoy that creates a personal connection. If the kids invade by accident, don't be embarrassed, introduce them. Let your team see you as a mother, father, spouse, partner just like they are.

Andrew Cuomo has been very good at this. Telling family stories like his failed attempts to host traditional Sunday Italian family dinner as a poor-cooking divorcee provides comfort / stability / relatability. I admire his authenticity and willingness to be personal to a national audience.

Being personal does not mean you should be "besties" with your team. There is a line. While you should know your teams' spouses/partners/kids, you also need to be able to deliver them news they don't want to hear. You need to have a personal relationship where they know you care, and they respect you, without having such a tight emotional connection you can't make appropriate business decisions.

This is why you need a set of "outside the company advisors" who you can discuss confidential things with. I am a big fan of a strong board of directors who will push back on you. Some individuals like YPO. Others have an informal set of individuals they can call on. Of course, it starts with a strong spouse or partner.

How about a positive result of C19? Have you ever had more family dinners? From Mitch Daniels' WaPo opinion piece a couple weeks ago: *Might the family meal make a slight resurgence? A YouGov survey in October [found](#) that 44 percent of Americans eat together fewer than four times a week, and 10 percent only on special occasions. Maybe a little extra togetherness could ensue. "Social distancing"*

doesn't mean eating in separate rooms. (You should put your Google alerts on and read anything Mitch puts out.)

I read once that the most common attribute of Rhodes Scholars was not their wealth, school or reading level but rather that they grew up having family dinners. I believe that is causation and not correlation. Family dinners force interaction among different personalities (see tomorrow's musing on conflict). It is also a multi-generational event which brings historical context to the conversation.

Be Safe. I appreciate any feedback you have.

Please remember you are free to forward, send a name you want added or request to be removed from this list. We are working on an accessible database of previous musings. More to come. If you want copies now, let Jennifer know.