

Rock Solid

A Leader is a Learner

"You stink."

Those were my family's welcoming words as I climbed into the booth at Island's restaurant. Not exactly what I was hoping to hear. But they were right.

I had just returned with my son from the *World Famous 10k Mud Run* sponsored annually by the Marine Corps at Camp Pendleton. For a little over an hour (depending on your speed), you have the 'privilege' to run in mud, crawl in mud, climb up hills lathered in mud. Notice a pattern here? All this for only \$50!

As the rookie to this "special opportunity", for several weeks I had interrogated my son (who did the race the year before) to load up my ledger with as much local knowledge as possible. I was anxious to learn. He briefed me on what to wear—basically items that you'd be willing to throw in the trash (which I did). He told me to keep my shoes as dry and as mud-free for as long as possible (which I didn't do). And he told me that there was a river crossing toward the end of the race and not to SWIM across it, but to FLOAT across it (which I tried, but failed...note to file: next time bring my grandson's water wings).

As I run through the game film of that memorable day, I am reminded that one of the realities of life and leadership is that we all live in a flow of human history of those who have gone before us—those who have already run the race or a substantial part of it.

So the question is: Will we be lifelong learners who relentlessly seek the local knowledge of those who have gone before us? In *Ascent of a Leader*, authors Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath size it up in these words: *One of the first signs of an endangered leader is a decrease in his willingness to hear and learn from the experiences of others.* And the wisest person who ever lived put it this way: *Intelligent people are always ready to learn. Their ears are open for knowledge* (Proverbs 18:15).

As you do a little self-reflection, do you possess a spirit of humility that easily owns up to the fact that you are a work in progress? That you've got a lot to learn?

Let's take it a step farther. Those who will lead well in the days ahead will know the value of both learning AND unlearning. Reggie McNeal in his classic book [*Practicing Greatness*](#) states: *Leaders who refuse to engage in lifelong unlearning set themselves up to be the relics of a world that is fast passing away...They stunt their growth...They die in place.*

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What does your learning (and unlearning) game plan look like?

A commitment to growing includes the books you read. The people with whom you spend time. The places you

explore. The passages you study. The courses you audit. The relationships you initiate. The counsel you seek. The networks you sustain. The reflection time you guard. The blogs you read. The webinars you attend. The cohort groups to which you belong.

At the of the day, lifelong learning comes down to resisting the process of calcification to ensure that your heart and mind remain permeable to new ideas, new information, new approaches. Because when it is all said and done, a leader who intends to lead with his life must be a person who is constantly learning from those having already scaled the often-muddy hills of life and leadership.

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