

## Leaders Are Lifelong Learners

“You smell awful!”

Those were my wife Pattie’s welcoming words as I met her at a local restaurant. And she called it 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 the “opportunity”, I interrogated my son (who did the race the year before) to find out from him as much local knowledge as possible. I was anxious to learn. He told me what to wear—basically items that you’d be willing to throw in the trash after the run (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 think about that day, I am reminded that one of the realities of life and leadership is that every one of us exists in a flow of human history of those who have gone before us—those who have already run the race.

So the question I have for you is: Will you be a lifelong learner who relentlessly seeks the local knowledge of those who have gone before you? King Solomon put it this way: *“Intelligent people are always ready to learn. Their ears are open for knowledge”* (Proverbs 18:15).

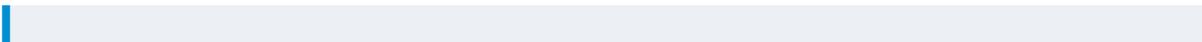
As you do a little self-reflection, do you find a full measure of humility that easily owns up to the fact that you are a work in progress? That you’ve got a lot to learn?

Author and consultant Reggie McNeal in *Practicing Greatness* tees up these reality-check words re what a leader needs to UNLEARN: *Leaders who refuse to engage in lifelong unlearning set themselves up to be relics of a world that is fast passing away...they run the risk of not only missing greatness but of sliding into effectiveness...they stunt their growth. They die in place, even if they don’t get “buried” for several more years.*

So here’s the question: **What does your learning gameplan look like?**

A commitment never to stop growing includes the books you read. The people you sit with. 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 podcasts you listen to. The reflection time you guard.

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But at the core, lifelong learning comes down to standing against 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 traversed the muddy peaks and valleys of life and leadership.

Chuck Olson

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