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**In Leadership remember, the foundation takes time.
A lesson from my walkway to your office.**

By Todd Mitchem

About two weeks ago, my father visited so that we could work on some home improvement projects together. One of these projects was constructing a replacement wooden walkway leading from the driveway to the front porch of my home. This task appeared to be simple on the surface, but as we began to take apart the existing structure we discovered that the task would, in fact, be much more challenging.

The first step was to take apart the existing walkway. This 29-year-old structure had stood the test of time, but was now becoming unsafe. From years of difficult weather conditions and constant use, the walkway was rotten in some areas and barely supported in others. Clearly, previous owners of our home had made attempts to repair the structure, but after time the small repairs could not hide the bigger challenge of a weakening support structure. At first the deconstruction was entertaining and fun. Later, however, came the realization that we had our work cut out for us. As we ventured into breaking old boards, removing screws, nails and wood, we realized that an entirely new support structure needed to be created. None of the existing boards could be utilized in the new walk and we would need to build concrete foundations for each critical support post. Now the fun was over. We had some real work to do.

Think for a moment about a project or initiative that needs rework to create a more effective result. On the surface, this too may appear to be a very simple procedure that will no doubt induce great change. Is the existing support strong enough to simply build on a new top structure or will the entire support need to be rebuilt? Over the years, what has succumbed to the pressure of the harsh elements surrounding your business? Often as leaders we look to old structures and ideas and say, "This is the way it has always been." Had my father and I followed that thinking, I would have a shiny new walkway built on a rotting foundation destined to eventually collapse. I have witnessed many of my clients attempting to build new initiatives on top of that same rotting understructure and the result is equally disastrous. The first step, then, to preparing any of your own company projects must start with the possibility of building a new foundation.

But Todd, this takes time!

Ah! Well there is the truth for certain. Believe me, I understand your situation. It took us more time to build the unseen foundation of my walkway than it did to complete the part you actually see as you walk across. Time? What else do you have but time? The time you don't take now will certainly jeopardize any project further down the road. How can you possibly construct anything of lasting value without taking the time to plan, gather information, design the RIGHT structure and then build a powerful foundation? We did take that time, which created a result of such strong footing I have advised my wife to tie the house to the walkway in the event of a horrific wind storm.



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What is the quality of any project you are working on right now? Are you certain that the foundational excellence of that project is stable? Have you taken the time to ask tough questions like, “How long will this new walkway last?” or “Do I have the right resources in the optimal positions?” What happens in our modern business environment is not unlike what started to happen to us during construction. We began to feel fatigue as the day wore on. We started to talk about cutting corners, using different supplies that were not correct and so on. Then we stopped, took a step back and decided that we must build this the right way now or risk coming back to it at another time and spending more time on the rework. Or even worse, jeopardizing the success of my family as we use that walkway every day.

Sound familiar? If you want your next initiative to be successful and stand the test of time, then you must ask these same tough questions. The quality is not up to chance. Instead it is only the result of your ability to stop, and then continue building the right foundation.

So how do you strengthen the foundation of your team? Try these first steps:

- 1) At the onset of every project, enlist the Use It philosophy and actually post these guidelines somewhere for all to refer to frequently, as they are the building blocks to success.

“Use It”

Understand the Big Picture

Say: My attitude dictates my experience.

Evict your ego!

Lassume nothing.

Take nothing personally.

- 2) At that moment when you are about to sacrifice quality for speed, remember the story I told you of that walkway. Your business relies on quality. Your integrity relies on quality, and people respect people who stand for the excellence that is possible.
- 3) Start with the right tools, materials and supplies from the beginning. However, if you don’t know what you don’t know, then do not be afraid to go back to the store and get what you need. The walkway will support you all the better for it.