



The Signature Voice

the quarterly newsletter for clients and friends of Isis Associates

Perseverance: Transforming Vision into Reality

Sticking to it, staying the course, picking yourself up and moving on – this is what perseverance is made of. Great leaders embody this secret ingredient to success. In the short term, perseverance ensures we complete and get the job done. In the long term, our perseverance calls up the faith and determination it takes to transform long-term visions and dreams into reality. In times when you struggle to stay motivated, want to quit, or move onto the next best thing, ask yourself three key questions:

What's really getting in the way? Start by first uncovering the core issues. Find the obstacles that stop you in your tracks or in some cases, have you prematurely jumping ship. Underlying drivers can include avoiding conflict or judgment by others, fear of failure, fear of making mistakes, poor physical energy, or not having clarity in one's purpose or convictions.

Take for example, Susan, a group manager in a leading software development company who felt stuck on a variety of projects. Susan described loving the “big picture thinking” at the start of any project, but then struggled keeping the ball moving forward. For the first two weeks of coaching, I asked Susan to self-observe when she got distracted, procrastinated or felt stalled on an important project. After a couple of weeks, she was stunned to uncover that her biggest roadblock occurred at critical decision making points that required her to stand up to difficult, aggressive colleagues or fight for additional resources.

What do I need to do? When we know what the underlying issues are behind our stalling or desire to quit, we are much better equipped to identify what to do. The beauty of looking into one's own perseverance is that the answer often leads us to the development of other leadership competencies such as communications effectiveness, focus, discipline, or resilience.

In the case of Susan, we actually first worked on rebuilding her energy levels – she was physically exhausted at the start of coaching having worried and mentally churned on “being stuck”. One of the major paradoxes of perseverance is that it often requires we know when to take a rest and recharge in order to keep going.

With a strong physical base, we then focused on Susan's core issue of strengthening her voice with others, the point where Susan most lost her ability to persevere. She was able to identify the colleagues who most threw her off balance, created pre-meeting rituals to help her stay centered, and practiced the skills of advocacy and influencing others.

What am I really working for? The quality of perseverance is especially critical to reaching long-term goals, dreams or vision for yourself or your organization. Long-term goals require faith, passion, and conviction to keep us moving in the right direction even when we are unable to see immediate results or achievement.

For Susan, she realized that she had not explicitly considered how her projects directly aligned with the strategic priorities of the company. As she realized the importance of her work to the organization's future revenue growth, she felt more fueled to step up as leader for her team.

Ultimately, it's the purpose, or commitment behind something, that expands our perseverance – fueling our ability to continue. Great athletes, artists, entrepreneurs, and leaders know this about the principle of mastery – a vision infused by purpose helps us to stick to something over the long term. Knowing “the why” behind what we are doing helps us to persevere even in the face of nay-saying peers or family, even in the face of set-backs or mistakes, even in the face of our own self-doubt and lack of confidence. If you know in your heart the goal or vision is right, keep walking in that direction.

- Amy Jen Su

Quarterly Reflection: Picking Yourself Up to Persevere

One of my favorite passages for inspiration comes from the book, "No Excuses" by Kyle Maynard. Kyle was born with a rare disorder called congenital amputation – living life without limbs, his arms ending at his elbows and his legs at his knees. Kyle's attitude and perseverance has enabled him to live a full, rich life including being a top student at the University of Georgia, one of the top wrestlers in the state of Georgia, and a motivational book author and speaker seen on shows such as Larry King and Oprah. From Kyle on picking yourself up:

*Whenever I have faced adversity, I have used that challenge as motivation to win through, no matter the cost.
When I meet with failure, I pick myself up, dust off the dirt from the fall and focus on trying again.
You cannot let failure get the best of you or give in to the temptation to take the easy way out.
The world's greatest accomplishments are not achieved on the first try.*

Reflection Questions:

1. How do you respond to setbacks, failures, or mistakes? What emotions do you experience?
2. What network of support do you have to help you during these experiences?
3. What dreams or goals could you reach by learning from these challenging times and continuing on?

Quarterly Book Selection: AM and PM Yoga for Beginners

What dog-eared, highlight-filled books are on our bookshelves that we find ourselves turning to time and time again and frequently recommending to others? Here's our book selection for this quarter:

AM and PM Yoga for Beginners
by Rodney Yee & Patricia Walden

This quarter, we present one of our favorite DVD's rather than a book. AM and PM Yoga for Beginners is a DVD we have recommended to many of our clients who want the physical, mental, and spiritual benefits a yoga practice can offer but are concerned about the time commitment. As a great starter, we recommend the AM component with Rodney Yee - it is only 20 minutes long, portable when traveling, usable for all yoga skill levels, and does not require anything but your ability to play the DVD. The rewards are plentiful as Rodney takes you through a sequence of moving yoga poses (physical asanas) and breathing practice (pranayama) intended to both relax and energize you in preparation for the day ahead. After a few weeks of following the morning practice, you will likely feel the benefits of feeling more replenished in body and spirit, increasing your resilience to daily work stress and expanding your natural ability to persevere.

From the Coach's Corner: "Forget Balance.... Think Buckets"

From the Client:

"I lead a mid-sized organization that is growing rapidly. While I love what I do, I am quite frankly starting to feel burned out. At times, I wonder how much longer I can keep going at this pace. The demands of my role are never-ending and achieving 'balance' seems impossible to me. I did take a vacation this summer but within a few days of being back in the office, the same old feeling returned. I not only worry about the effect of burn-out on myself, but also how it impacts my effectiveness in leading the organization."

From the Coach's Corner:

We work ourselves to the bone all year long, take two weeks off in the summer and expect to feel replenished, reenergized, and renewed. Ironic, isn't it? The fact of the matter is that achieving balance may seem out of reach, but avoiding burnout is certainly a possibility. The key is to work at it all year long, not just focus on it during your holiday break. You owe it to yourself and your organization to keep yourself energized over the long haul.

Imagine, if you will, that you are responsible for holding three buckets all the time: the Mental bucket, the Physical bucket, and the Spiritual bucket. To avoid burnout, you must ensure that these buckets remain full at all times - - this means no leakage and no overflowing. This does not mean that you should spend equal time in each - - just that you give each their proper attention.

The Mental Bucket: This is where most of us spend our time. Work is done through mental processing, communicating, idea generation, producing and delivering results. We are constantly thinking, thinking, thinking and when we are done with the list of to do's we think up new items to add to the list. While a necessary part of work productivity, this bucket is often overflowing wasting energy unnecessarily. When is the last time you took inventory to make sure that what you are worrying about really matters? How sure are you that you are concentrating on the right things at the right time? To what extent do you continue to process your work even when you are supposed to be focusing on something else -- like your family or yourself? It takes discipline to set boundaries on what to focus on and when. The ability to prioritize and reprioritize as necessary is a critical leadership competency to master.

The Physical Bucket: This bucket represents your body. It does not mean that you need to be a triathlete in Olympian shape. Rather, having a full physical bucket is that you are consistently engaging in physical self-care through practices such as exercise, proper nutrition, and adequate rest. The primary excuse for letting the Physical Bucket leak is lack of time. Use your problem solving skills to overcome that excuse by making it your goal to find one hour a week to dedicate to filling your Physical Bucket. One of the most successful, well-regarded and busiest leaders I know makes it a known fact that he goes running during lunch - - every day. This does not stop him from taking meetings at that time - - it just means that whoever wants to meet with him then must run along beside him for five miles!

The Spiritual Bucket: The English word "spirit" comes from the Latin word spiritus, which means "breath" and also "courage, vigor". What leader does not require courage and vigor to get through the long haul of directing their organization to greatness? We are talking beyond dogma here - - rather, keeping the Spiritual Bucket full is a way of keeping you in touch with what keeps you going, gives you faith to push through even in tough times, and the conviction that your contribution is worthwhile of all the work. Every successful person fills his or her Spiritual Bucket differently whether it is through philanthropic compassion, religious practice, yoga, meditation or journaling. What they have in common is that replenishing their spirit is a disciplined part of their everyday lives and their identity rather than a post-script. Left ignored, the Spiritual Bucket leaks slowly but steadily and often requires a harsh toppling over before one realizes how empty it is.

With summer winding to an end, make a commitment to not wait until your next vacation for some replenishment. Rather, visualize your buckets everyday - - how full are they? Are some overflowing? Are others leaking? Make it a part of your daily life to fill your Mental, Physical and Spiritual buckets appropriately. You will feel the difference. As will your organization.

- Muriel Maignan Wilkins

If you have a particular challenge or question you would like for us to address, feel free to email it to us at info@isisassociates.com.