

LEADING IN THE SHADOW: ACCOMPLISHMENTS THAT LAST

LEADING IN THE SHADOW – REFLECTIONS ON THE INHERENT DIFFICULTY OF GETTING ANYTHING OF LASTING VALUE ACCOMPLISHED

Life is hard. And if life is hard, it follows that **leadership is doubly difficult**. A better tomorrow is not inevitable. Progress is not served up to the organization on a silver platter. There are no four-lane highways to the future. The future does not arrive on time at the beck and call of the leader.

Even a well-communicated and compelling vision linked with brilliant strategies may take years to produce results.

Things may get worse. The months and years ahead may be profoundly disappointing. Seemingly immovable obstacles halt the most determined among us. It's a good bet that the resolve of some and at times, entire organizations, will dissolve well short of the Promised Land.

A new tomorrow must be wrestled from the clutches of a stubborn and subversive today; a status quo full of "no." These negations come in the form of a thousand points of push back, some small and merely bothersome, but others more formidable. This array of resistance is strenuously opposed to progress. If the trip were easy, you would already be there along with a multitude of others.

IN LIGHT OF THESE SOBERING REALITIES, LEADERS NEED TO KEEP TWO THINGS IN MIND ALONG THE WAY TO THE FUTURE.

FIRST, EXPECT DIFFICULTY, DELAY AND DISCOURAGEMENT.

Once the vision is announced and the strategic framework is set, the "impatience clock" begins ticking. A few may quit at the first signs of difficulty. Some may grow cynical and infect the community with a spirit of pessimism and resignation to the status quo. And still others may lose heart and hope, and eventually quit out of sheer fatigue. This is all to say that the months and years take their toll, especially when there is little or no progress to show for your work and sacrifice.

SECOND, THERE'S NOT A LOT YOU CAN DO ABOUT THE FIRST POINT.

The cold truth is that the journey to the future is much, much, much more difficult and takes much longer than most of us care to admit and that few of us realized in the more optimistic, beginning stages of the journey.

The timetable for progress is impacted by a multitude of variables, many of which delay progress and most of which are out of the control of the organization and its leaders. There's a lot of time for a lot to go wrong.

As I consider the inherent difficulty involved in accomplishing anything of lasting value, I take comfort, albeit a perverse comfort in the hard words of T. S. Eliot's 1925 work, *The Hollow Men*.

EVERY LEADER WHO ASPIRES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN A FALLEN WORLD—A WORLD NOT MERELY INDIFFERENT TO OUR BEST INTENTIONS, BUT RADICALLY OPPOSED TO THEM—SHOULD TAKE THIS LITERARY MASTERPIECE TO HEART.

quote *The Hollow Men* in part, beginning with the fifth movement.

Here we go around the prickly pear. Prickly pear prickly pear. Here we go around the prickly pear. At five o'clock in the morning. Between the idea. And the reality Between the motion. And the act. Falls the Shadow. For Thine is the Kingdom

Between the conception. And the creation. Between the emotion. And the response. Fall the Shadow. Life is very long

Between the desire. And the spasm. Between the potency. And the existence Between the essence. And the descent. Falls the Shadow. For Thine is the Kingdom

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

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