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Leadership Inspiration: Feelin' Groovy

By Mary Simmons

Editor's Note: In the Leadership & Development Section's Leadership Inspiration Contest, entrants were asked to tell us what inspired them to be a better actuarial leader. Here is an entry from the "Book/Song" category.

When I was in the seventh grade, my school choir sang the Simon and Garfunkel classic "59th Street Bridge Song." The song has stuck with me throughout my life since then and is the mantra that I try to live by. While "Feelin' Groovy" hardly sounds like an inspiration for leadership, it helps me keep my life in perspective. With a job that focuses on mortality, this matters to me.

"Slow down, you move too fast" is the first line that comes to mind when I start getting stressed out. Good leaders have to slow down so that they can fully evaluate and process what is going on. Yes, sometimes we have to move fast—but not "too fast." We should take the time for whatever intelligence gathering we can, whatever introspection we need, and whatever thoughtful planning is called for. Sometimes, slowing down allows us and those around us to work more intelligently so that the right work gets done rather than just busy work. Good leaders care about results—not just work.

"Looking for fun and feelin' groovy" is the next line that always comes to mind. The "feeling groovy" part makes me smile—but I do think it is important to look for fun in the work that we do. Sometimes honest-to-goodness fun can be had—which makes everyone a little happier and makes people pleased to do their part. However, sometimes the best we can hope for is to get into a groove so that the work is not quite as painful as it might otherwise be. In either case, the leader has to look for ways to make that happen. Sometimes it is as simple as setting people up to do what they most enjoy doing. The best leaders make people want to follow them, and they do that by inspiring others.

"Hello lamppost, what'cha knowing" is a silly line, but it reminds me of an important point. Asking questions is critical to being a good leader. Open-ended questions require people to think before they answer. Listening to those answers is very important. Sometimes the most important insights come from the



most surprising places. Leaders have to ask questions and listen to the answers to get to those insights.

"I've come to watch your flowers growin'" reminds me to slow down again. I need that reminder a lot. In this case, I have to slow down to monitor progress—watching the flowers growing, if you will. If things are going according to plan, then I need to know it and react. Hard to do if I don't slow down and pay attention. (See "slow down, you move too fast.")

"I got no deeds to do, no promises to keep" is pure fantasy, but it reminds me to delegate. Even when we manage to delegate, there is always something to do. Still, the best leaders delegate. A leader with too many to-dos spends too much time doing and not enough time leading. Our job is not to do all the work, but to make sure that the work gets done. There is an important distinction.

"Life, I love you, all is groovy."

I remember studying for actuarial exams, using all sorts of memory aids to help me get through the burden of studying. As such, I suppose that it is not really weird that I use a song to remind me to slow down, celebrate accomplishments, ask for feedback, observe and delegate. Plus, the song is easier to remember than most of the mnemonics that I came up with on exams!

Leadership is not supposed to be a chore, although it is sometimes a burden. However, poor leadership can be a serious burden for those who work with us. Embrace the leadership role, get into the groove, and make things happen! ■



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