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Leadership Inspiration: Leadership Is Influence

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

An event taught me leadership is influence. A few years ago, I was called to an impromptu meeting with my manager. (I'll call him Jimmy; that isn't his name.) I walked in, sat down across from him, and waited for the news. After a few awkward minutes of trying to deliver bad news softly, I interrupted Jimmy and asked him to just give it to me straight. A few seconds later, Jimmy said the words that changed everything: "I don't think I can work with you anymore."

I didn't listen much after that but I can summarize it in one sentence: I had a few months to find a different team, department or job.

Back then, I thought getting demoted was a failure in itself. Today, I think it is the best thing that has happened to me thus far. Why?

At the time of the meeting with Jimmy, I was leading a team of five. I was at work 60–80 hours a week. Highly stressful environment, lots of pressure and tight deadlines, with high-stakes projects.

In contrast, the new role was as an individual contributor. Standard 40-hour work weeks, seasonal projects, flexible deadlines, and no one to worry about other than myself. To be honest, I was bored! After many years of constant activity, the new role felt slow. I thought, "What in the world do I do with all this free time?"

Other than video games, TV and sports, I started reflecting on my "failure":

- What went wrong with Jimmy?
- What did I miss about that role?
- What was I passionate about?
- What behaviors did I need to change, improve or keep?
- What did I want to do next?
- How could I get better?



Out of everything I learned during this period, there's one item that produced the greatest impact: I learned I needed space to think and process ideas.

Thus, I started a blog and a newsletter. The process of writing helps me digest information while at the same time elicit feedback from others. Not only was I learning, I was also sharing my story.

To my surprise, it was in the process of sharing my story that I built greater influence than before. I had people outside the department asking for my opinion and ideas. Other managers looked for my help with staff issues. And the newer analysts came to me for guidance.

Thus, I went from leading a team of five to zero to influencing dozens.

All this was possible thanks to Jimmy, and the law of reflection: Learning to pause allows growth to catch up with you. ■



Juan Arroyo, ASA, MAAA, wakes up every day looking for the question that allows an individual to break through a self-limiting belief and become a better version of oneself. He can be reached at juanri31@gmail.com.