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Evolving Leaders • Transforming Organisations

Good Beginnings & Good Endings

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Our lives are full of beginnings and endings. Appreciating this, many cultures pay very close attention to beginnings and endings in the form of rituals. If we look into these rituals we find the essence of them is to start and finish well. In business we can experience the effects of poor beginnings and poor endings without realising what has contributed to the difficulties we encounter. When we get it right it provides benefits that can go unnoticed so it is understandable that we might not realise how important good beginnings and endings are.

CREATING GOOD BEGINNINGS

There is a big difference between a relationship that gets off to a good start and one that gets off to a bad start. A good start provides a strong and sound foundation for a relationship, but a bad start often results in lots of extra work to get things back on track, or else the relationship might simply go from bad to worse, and then fail.

When people join a system (a family, a group, a function or an organisation), that system has an established purpose. The people who join need to have something of value to that system's purpose or else they don't find their place. A good beginning depends on having a clear sense of belonging from the beginning.

It is important to have this sense of belonging from within yourself and also from those who are already part of the system. When the existing members welcome you, it feels like you have your own place within the system. This is why it is helpful to be introduced when you start a new role, so that existing members can learn who you are and what assets you have to bring to the situation, and you can learn the same about them. Each person can then see how everyone else adds value.



If you force yourself into a system in which you do not belong, disturbances arise which indicate a poor fit. This requires the people who are responsible for the system concerned pay attention to the purpose of the system, so that they can take action to make sure everything is in its right place. This can happen when you oversell yourself into a situation that is not authentic. It may be the best thing to admit this and leave for both yourself and the group concerned. On the other hand we might join, cause a disturbance that highlights something important that was unclear until the incident that made it visible. Now it is visible something can become clearer and be acted on in consideration of the best interest relative to the purpose.

When the right person is in the right place for the right reasons at the right time, we can feel confident there will be a good relationship that will serve the purpose of the system. Everyone benefits because people are aligned with mutual interests and their actions are congruent with their purpose.

So, good beginnings require the system to provide an invitation based on personal alignment, a warm welcome, an orientation and explanation of boundaries, space for new entrants and the opportunity for everyone to get to know each other. Then the organisation can receive the value the new person has to offer by helping them use their skills to serve the main purpose.

Sometimes the offer comes in an unexpected or unattractive form, like through conflict or opposition, but this can also lead to a valuable collaboration. This is leveraged by diversity – you can pay attention to the value added by a different point of view. In some cases, the value added is short lived and a time for parting may follow.

CREATING GOOD ENDINGS

When it is time to go, it is time to go. That time comes when a person's season of contribution is over. This happens to CEO's, directors, chairmen and politicians, and it happens with clients, in roles and in jobs. We make things messy if we do not recognise this time and make a healthy, respectful departure.

Even if someone leaves a role, they remain part of that system having made a contribution in the past that is still having an effect. If we ignore or deny this, it creates disturbance in the system. One of the most common ways is to lose sight of the people who came first e.g. the founders. This can also happen when a person leaves in a bad way, e.g., if someone doesn't want the person to leave and resists them leaving; if the person is exited or retrenched without respect; if the person leaves prematurely; or if the person leaves way past their use-by date.

Good endings ensure that the next person who joins can begin unencumbered. But endings and beginnings all come around; if the new person brings something left over from another place, they bring those dynamics into the new situation. Ideally, everyone will leave their old situations well and bring the full-bodied gifts from their past into their present.

Think about a time when you have left a situation or relationship well. It might have felt like everything that needed to be acknowledged was said and you were free to go on to your next adventure with the blessing of your previous colleagues. This might have included acknowledging:



- the recognition of what you had contributed
- the possibilities of your contribution being leveraged in the future
- the part you had played in this system even though you were to be leaving
- the value of the experience
- the gifts you developed that you would be taking with you
- the memories you would take with you
- the appreciation you felt
- possibly the sadness at leaving
- the joy of what was coming next

When all these things are said, people can look each other in the eye, feel seen, acknowledged and respected, and both be free to go forward on a good basis.

This is a key principle in creating healthy system dynamics and is embraced in organisational and business constellations.

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