

MONDAY MANNA

13 April 2020

LEAVING COMFORT, OVERCOMING FEAR – WE START LEARNING

By Sergio M. Fortes

In past Monday Manna's, I have written about the difficulties we face leaving "the comfort zone," along with how to overcome what I termed "the fear zone." Now we can enter a true oasis for people in the workplace, one we can call "the learning zone"! This learning zone offers many challenges, but also great opportunities for discovering new skills, many of them we would not find inside the comfort zone.

The Learning Zone features engaging in a process by which new skills, abilities, knowledge, behaviours and/or values can be acquired or modified through study, experience, training, reflection and observation. This aligns with each person's individual characteristics and learning style. The best methodology includes appropriate tools, consistent with the intended objectives.

Learning typically helps the person acquiring knowledge to become a happier, more fulfilled person. In discovering new opportunities and unraveling new worlds, the learner develops a new habit, a continuous practice of learning. There are many approaches for learning, but none is more effective than the process of one person teaching another.

In the corporate environment, this is commonly known as mentoring. The *mentor* and the one who is mentored, often called the protégé or mentee, embark on a mutual learning journey, sharing experiences through a special relationship in which they both learn. I personally regret that it was not until I was 30 years old that I experienced the privilege of having a mentor. Had I been the beneficiary of mentoring earlier in my career, I would have been a better professional – and could have avoided a lot of the mistakes and wrong decisions that I made.

Since then I have discovered successful learning involves strong commitment on the part of both the teacher (mentor) and the learner. The teacher should do so with the humility of a student, giving one's best to those that are learning. And those being taught should display the eagerness of someone receiving a priceless treasure.

Such teaching traces back thousands of years, even being a foundational part of the Bible. In a Christian environment, mentoring is better known as "discipleship." This unique learning process involves at least two characters: one who becomes a follower of Jesus while learning, and the other who learns to be a follower of Jesus of Nazareth while teaching.

This concept was so important, it dominated the last words of Jesus Christ as He was preparing to leave His earthly ministry. He said: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you"* (Matthew 28.18-20). Known as His "Great Commission," it represents what we could call today the "core business," the true mission of an organisation. He was defining the true mission for each of His followers: to make disciples. He established the scope of their action – all nations - and made clear how the process was to be done – teaching.

Obviously, teaching and learning are not confined to spiritual purposes. Every organisation that invests in learning and training activities, developing its staff to their fullest capabilities, will reap permanent rewards. In the same way, the person who self-invests in the "learning zone" will find windows to unimaginable opportunities. Learning is a task to be shared. To withhold knowledge just for ourselves would be selfish. As

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the apostle Paul wrote to his protégé, Timothy, *“the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others”* (2 Timothy 2: 2).

Armed with expertise from our time in the learning zone, we can move to the last stage in our professional development journey: “the growing zone.” We will consider this in a future edition of “Monday Manna.”

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

By way of review, what are your understandings of “the comfort zone” and the “fear zone”? Why is it important to progress beyond these two areas if we are to grow professionally?

What is your perception of “the learning zone”? Do you find yourself there right now, or is that an area you need to explore? Explain your answer.

Do you agree that one of the very best approaches for learning is one person teaching another in a mentoring relationship, which ideally results in a mutual learning experience? Why or why not?

Have you been mentored – or have you mentored someone else? What are the strengths and challenges of mentoring, drawing from your own experience?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:

1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

Philippians 3:17, 4:8-9

Hebrews 5:12