How to Detox Your Leadership and Fuel Your Growth

Metabolize your leadership experiences

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The mere mention of her name would bring back the knots in my shoulders and the twitch in my eye. I lay awake countless nights reliving our heated conversations. I kept beating myself up with the "what if" and "should have" scenarios.

The six-month ministry crisis had taken its toll on me emotionally, physically, relationally, and spiritually. When it was all said and done, I continued to experience the side effects of such a season: fear, distrust, doubt, and exhaustion would shake my confidence time and again. I was a hot mess.

A healing combination of counseling, coaching, community, spiritual direction, and time helped me let go and move on. My circle of coaches helped me do what Dr. Henry Cloud calls "metabolizing an experience." In his excellent book *Necessary Endings*, Dr. Cloud shares that we need to do with experiences what our bodies do with food: keep what will fuel us and eliminate the waste.

Every experience, whether amazing or awful, needs to be broken down and processed through our system in order to keep our leadership healthy and thriving. As leaders, we often move so fast that we miss the opportunity to celebrate the win or grieve the loss we just experienced. And just like with our bodies, waste that is not eliminated makes us toxic.

As a leadership coach and communicator, I often have the privilege of walking leaders through this process. If you would like to try it for yourself, carve out some time alone with your favorite journal or notepad. Invite God to join you in the exercise. You might want to pray or meditate on Psalm 139:23, which says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts."

When you feel your heart and mind are prepared to begin, the first question I recommend answering is "What recent experience or ending do I need to metabolize?" Write a summary statement of this experience across the top of your page.

Next, divide the paper into two columns. At the top of the left column, write the following question: "What aspects of this experience will fuel my growth?" You might include things like lessons learned, results achieved, boundaries implemented, and strengths recognized; anything making you a stronger leader in the long run.

At the top of the right column, write the question "What aspects of this experience will be toxic to me and need to be eliminated?" Examples of things I have written in this column are unconfessed sin, unhealthy habits or relationships, bitterness, unforgiven debts, shame, fear, a critical spirit, and unrealistic expectations. Capture here anything weighing you down and holding you back from being a healthy, thriving leader.

When you finish writing, you may recognize further work needs to be done to eliminate some of your toxins from your system. Consider what specific actions you need to take for each one. Consider also who you need to ask to help you take these steps. Maybe you need to have a tough conversation with a co-worker. Maybe you need to invite a spiritual friend to help you shake your critical spirit. Or maybe you need to contact a professional counselor or support group to finally find freedom from a hurt, habit or hang-up. Before you leave the metabolizing process, decide how and when you will take each step.

Metabolizing experiences is not easy work, my leader friend. However, doing the tough work of sorting through the fuel and the waste of your leadership experiences will leave you energized and ready for your next challenge. And who doesn't want that?

What experiences do you need to metabolize today?