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No Time To Give Feedback To Your Team? Leaders Have To Make Time.

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In our interview, [Annemarie Durbin](#), one of our mentors at [Merryck & Co.](#), shared smart insights about how leaders have

to make intentional choices about how they spend their time.

Q. What are the most common themes that come up when you're advising senior executives?

A. The big ones include making space and time to think, and part of that is having a conversation about what only they can do, and what they can and should delegate. If they say that they don't feel like they can delegate aspects of their job to their team, then we'll talk about whether their direct reports can be coached to do it.

And if they can't, perhaps they've got the wrong people on their team and they need to be changed. But often it's not really about the capabilities of their team — it's about the person not being able to let go because they don't think anybody is good enough.

Another is relationships. People often have trouble giving feedback, and it can tie into why they don't feel their team is good enough. They may never give them feedback about what they want from them, what they expect, what good looks like, what they need to be different. And their rationale is that they haven't got time. I tell them that they've got to make time to give them feedback. It's often based on a fear of conflict, or an inability to articulate the feedback in a specific, meaningful way.

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other people.*

A third one is about purpose, and wondering about the importance and meaning of the work they are doing. And I tell them that it's really important to live your life on purpose rather than living it at the behest of other people, and to make choices that have conscious consequences. It often starts with understanding what success looks like when they are retired and looking back through all their roles in life. That then raises other questions like, what things do you have to do now to make sure you live the life that you want to lead?

It's so easy to get on that hamster wheel and you just go for the next job and the next job and the next job and the next job, and before you know it, you're retired and exhausted, and maybe feeling a sense of regret. But people make choices every day, even if they feel like they don't have a choice. It's about living your life on purpose, not living the life that others think you should live.

It's interesting to ask people what character they would play in the movie that represents the rest of their life. There's the movie that they've lived until this moment in time. But they are in control of the next phase of that movie. What is the sequel going to be? And they can absolutely choose that, even if they don't think they can. And if they don't, the sequel will be boring because it will be a repetition of the previous one.

Q. Let's shift to you personally. What are the top lessons that you learned in all your leadership roles?

A. I learned that my secret sauce was that I have this ability to go into a new team — it doesn't matter which country, the nationalities or ages of the team members — and really understand what motivated each of the individuals and how to combine them into a winning team.

I worked in Standard Chartered Bank for 20 years of my career, and I was in 16 different roles over that time, leading different teams. I became the sort of jack of all trades, master of none, except for the magic of being able to combine people quickly into teams that really worked.

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I spend enormous amounts of time individually with people to really understand what makes them tick, how to motivate them, and I care about how they become their best selves. That approach to leadership has consequences, because it's incredibly time-consuming to spend so much one-on-one time. I appreciate that there are other ways of building teams, but it was a formula that worked for me.

Q. How did you get a diverse group to work together well?

A. By helping them really understand that we're all different. The fact

that we look at things and see things and interact with the world in different ways is good. It's about understanding where everyone is coming from and their intent, not just how it's manifested, and spending time with each other to get to know each other to be able to see more of the whole person. It's really about building trust and the sense that they are a unified group.

Q. Where did that skill come from for you?

A. I think it comes from my childhood, which was very volatile because of my parents. That meant you had to become really good at observing the mood, knowing what buttons definitely not to push and when to engage and when to keep away. But that skill has a downside.

Q. Which is?

A. The one regret I have in my professional life is that I didn't spend enough time building relationships with peers. I spent huge amounts of time building relationships with teams and my bosses but not with my peers. The 360 feedback I would get is that they felt I was always judging them, though I wasn't. I was observing and listening carefully and trying to understand what makes them tick.

Because of the burdens that I carry from my childhood, I

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generally have low trust of people, and that has manifested itself in me being fiercely independent, thinking that I don't need anybody. For many years, I'd approach situations with a scarcity mentality, which is

the idea that one of us is still going to be standing at the end of this, and I can tell you right now it's going to be me.

That would make me quite confrontational, often more than I needed to be, and needing to be in control and not asking for help from my colleagues and peers. But I learned over time that there's enough opportunity for everybody in life, and that it's best to play to everyone's individual strengths.