

Pearls of Leadership Wisdom: Traditions

Welcome to my rather chilly backyard and Pearls of Leadership Wisdom. We are entering that time of year when all of us have some traditions that we think about how we can now deliver them.

Let me tell you about a tradition that existed in my family, still exists in my family. My grandmother, Carrie, and then my mother, made the best sweet caramel rolls for Thanksgiving or Christmas brunch. It wasn't just that those rolls were so fabulous to have, but it was the whole process of their being made: It was kneading the dough, it was smelling the yeast mixture, it was stirring the caramel to make sure that it didn't burn in the pan, and finally, it was enjoying the smell of the entire house being exactly like a bakery the day before the feast. So now that is a tradition that I continue today. If you are part of my family and you weren't going to be here for that holiday, you would get a box of sweet rolls fedexed to your front door.

So I think about your traditions. What are some of your traditions? And I bet if you think about them, they stop and make you smile, they might make you laugh, and certainly they fill you with gratitude and love. But why are traditions so powerful? I think there are several reasons. One is they connect us with each other, a second is they give us a sense of meaning, and a third is they provide us with stability and consistency. Isn't that something wonderful that we all need at this point in time?

So exploring the power of tradition and traditions led me to think about leaders and organizations. Because traditions are important there as well. They give people a sense of belonging and provide a feeling about consistency and stability that is important in the lives of organizations too. In short, tradition and rituals matter.

Now a ritual, in my view, is somewhat different than a tradition. A ritual is typically used to acknowledge a passage, a beginning, an ending, a new event, but it surrounds that new event. I think about Medtronic, for example, that used to do every January, an all-employee annual meeting, and at that meeting they featured new products, physician experiences, and inspiring patient stories. There was no way they would miss having that ritual in place for the year. In fact, I hope they still do it.

So here is a challenge for you. What rituals or traditions need to be either revived, enhanced, or created in your organization? What things might you put in place or have put in place in the past that give people that sense of belonging or purpose? Here is a task for you. Gather your team together, talk about the traditions that you have all experienced and figure out what it is you can do that would either revive a tradition that you have in the organization, or be something that you can start that people would actually care about. I so believe that traditions and rituals in organizations make a difference and we as leaders need to do things to nurture, and to savor, and even yes, sometimes to start them.

So I can't wait to hear some of your stories about traditions in your organizations. Thank you.