



LIVE IN THE LAYERS, NOT THE LITTER

Adjusting your focus to be a better teammate

BY CAROL BROOKS, SR/WA

Stanley Kunitz, an American poet who twice held the post of U.S. Poet Laureate, wrote *The Layers* towards the end of his life. This haunting poem depicts his experience with aging and loss, and through the poem we are taught the life lesson to “live in the layers, not the litter.” No doubt, we all can identify with the tendency to focus on the litter versus the interpersonal growth that evolves from “each layer” or each event we face.

This focus can have a strong effect on how you are as a teammate. Whether you are a team lead or a member of a team, your contributory value is tucked within the layers of your life, with each layer representing events in time, such as your struggles or your successes. Think about the layers of rock that make up the walls of a canyon. These layers

are not only beautiful; they are a record of the canyon’s ancient history, with each layer telling the story of a different geological era. It seems to me that our lives take us through different “geological eras.” Each one leaves a layer of evidence about what happened during that time, what we did and what was done to us.

Of course, most of us have eras we would wish to forget—and becoming preoccupied with the “litter” that’s always on the surface of our lives gives us an easy excuse to do exactly that. These layers form the quality of our contributory value and its impact to our team. Therefore, it’s imperative that we discipline ourselves to let life to create amazing layers within us and in turn, this allows us to offer our best to others.

Patience is Key

It takes discipline to *not* focus on layers of doubt and fear, and to instead search our horizon for new levels of power and potential. But think about it. Would your team rather you bring doubt and fear to the table or power and potential? And what would you choose to represent who you are? Do we affix our sights on the layers vs. the litter?

The discipline to focus on our strengths is embedded in patience with ourselves to *slowly* peel off the many layers in order to find ourselves. If we resist and are impatient, then the peeling becomes a task and not a process. A task is something dreaded, while a process sees the finish line. Process defines goals and mileposts to reach those goals. But how do we shift from task orientation to living freely through process?

The construction of our layers means that we should embrace the saying, “bless the struggle.” When I’ve been patient enough and allowed the process to take center stage in my life, I’ve learned that struggle invites me to stay the course, to straddle my stance, and to let a particular life lesson do its work in my life. These

lessons strengthen me against life’s monstrous winds, its abnormally high tides and its grueling discomfort. In large part, my attitude has everything to do with my perspective—whether I’m focused on blessing the struggle or damning the struggle.

A Work in Progress

Attitude is everything. That’s why we can never afford to have a negative thought. You may have heard the saying, “garbage in, garbage out.” When we feed negativity into our mind, then eventually we’ll see it displayed in our actions. A negative mindset is poison to our team. Most importantly, it keeps us bogged down and instead of constructing a healthy layer, we see the litter.

We become whole by having the courage to revisit and embrace all the layers of our lives. By denying none of them, we’re finally able to say, “Yes, all of this is me, and all of this has helped make me who I am.” We can look at all the layers together and see the beauty of the whole. We are a work in progress, clinging to the hope of changing for the better and with a mindset to live in the layers, not in the litter. ☘



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