

Leadership Restraint: The Power in Holding Back



Restraint. Likely a concept that awakens some kind of emotions or recollection of experiences for any leader. A quick scan of the news produces ample example of what happens when a leader lacks self-control, but what happens when we harness for success? Successful leaders are well accustomed with the need to push, drive, persevere, and muster. But how many of us calibrate intention, goals, and achievement through restraint? Let's explore what happens when great leaders "restrain to succeed":

1. *Leaders control the desire to do it all.* Maybe you could do it better, maybe not, but empowering someone else to try increases buy-in, which increases team ownership and responsibility. Good leaders are responsible. Great leaders possess the courage to give responsibility away.

And this doesn't only apply to tasks. Conversation and presence are often some of the most difficult points to entrust. Restrained leaders don't

always need to have the last word. Cheryl intentionally ends every phone call by asking, “what is one word you want to conclude our time together with” or, “what are your final thoughts as we end our call today?” Leave space for people to grow. Whether it is letting silence linger in conversation, or letting gaps linger in the company, give people the opportunity to fill space. They may surprise you with what they do with that space.

2. Leaders leave people wanting more. Good negotiators know that we are all attracted to suspense. Whether negotiating, leading a meeting, or addressing a situation, give quality of voice, rather than quantity. Few, select insights leave a far greater impression than countless weightless interjections. Anyone can talk a lot but not say much. Be the kind of person who makes people hungry to listen when you open your mouth.

When you do speak up, curb the desire to show all of your cards. After placing something on the table, let it lie for a bit. Don’t succumb to the desire to establish authority by saying everything you know. This stunts valuable input from others, and minimizes opportunity to clarify or adapt. Restraint opens the door to what a leader “didn’t know that they didn’t know”, and creates space to come back later to qualify things with words and actions.

3. Leaders stay focused. When high-level performers are focused, they know the difference between what is important and what is critical. Most C-level executives have agendas and conversations crowded with “important”. Walk in to meetings knowing what is critical and refrain from jumping in to distractions that, while they are important, could be handled by someone else. Staying focused also means knowing your walk-away point. In negotiating, in business relationships, even in life; know how far you are prepared to take the conversation, where you are willing to compromise, and when it is time you walk away.

In conclusion, there are many voices telling us “more is more”. However, when it comes to seeing the people around us thrive, strategic leadership restraint shows us that contributing less often ends up returning more.