

Keeping Perspective:

Putting the Blinders On

By Amie Gamboian, Executive Leadership Coach

The sport of thoroughbred horse racing has fascinated me since childhood. Equine blood lines marked by greatness, the magnificence of the animals, the thrill of close victories, and unique stories of the horses, owners, trainers and jockeys are inspiring. It's certainly a complex and expensive sport; yet, a \$19.99 pair of blinders makes a huge difference in performance and ultimately prevents horses from disqualifying themselves.

Without blinders on, even the most experienced racehorses can become panicky, jumpy and distracted...to the point of running into other horses, creating injuries, and disqualifying themselves and others from races. Equally so, when leaders fail to keep their blinders on, the demands of leadership can result in disqualification and loss of true influence that's sustainable.

Using the tool called perspective can be as helpful to leaders as blinders are to thoroughbreds. Perspective is about having an accurate understanding of the relative importance of something - a sense of its *proportion* as it relates to the whole. When our perspective gets off kilter, so do our proportions. How we invest our time, energy, focus, relationships, money and strategies can quickly become misaligned from our true values. Internal growth, relationship health, long term investments, service to others, and valuing the process, often slip down the priority list when you're overvaluing short term successes, performance and outcomes.

Without perspective, we often try to be like another leader, compare and fall short, forget who we truly are, place too much emphasis on what's temporary. We look to the left and right, focusing more on what another company, church, or athletic team is doing, rather than on what we know to do in the specific way we're gifted to do it.

Like muscles atrophying, when perspective slides, we lose our capacity to harness learns, autopsy successes and conduct emotional audits. Without even recognizing it, high achieving leaders who have lost perspective can allow people to become tasks, while winning, profit, performance, numbers, and achieving success at all costs become paramount. Maintaining a healthy perspective is challenging and contrary to a lot of the messaging and pressures around us. However, it's necessary to fight for; otherwise, you'll disqualify yourself through a diminishing of your influence.

Influence is the ability to affect mindsets, actions, and change in others. It travels through relationships, making its greatest impact where those are strongest. People follow leaders with healthy perspective who have relationally invested in them - where they are known and respected, trust flows, accounts are kept short, and apologies are extended.

Of course, this doesn't bypass the need to reach results. The key is in keeping perspective about the achievements and outcomes you're going after while adding tremendous value to what will last far longer: people and relationships. Acting out of healthy perspective will prevent you from disqualifying yourself and will increase your success with results and people. Keeping your blinders on will undoubtedly expand your influence.