

Long Distance Leadership Postcards - Transcript

[MUSIC PLAYING] Hello, and welcome back to Long Distance Leadership Postcards. This month's topic is walk and talk. I'm Maren Deepwell, the creator of this program, and I'm excited to tell you a little bit more about why I picked the topic and how I think it could be useful to you. [MUSIC PLAYING]

This month's postcard invites you to step away from the frantic pace of digital productivity and discover where your feet may take you. What would your week reimagined as a walk look like? Where might you go?

I hope when you're listening to this that you've already received this month's card. And if not, then hopefully it will arrive in your letterbox really soon. I wrote this particular card with an image of a beautiful coastal garden in Dunraven Bay in Wales in the UK. And it's a beautiful place for a coastal walk, usually quite blustery, but definitely a wonderful way to blow the cobwebs from your mind. And this is really why I picked this month's topic. Because in my experience, life in leadership roles can feel super frantic with so many competing demands for attention and decisions that need to be made. And it can be quite a lonely place to be. So I picked this month's topic to help you reflect on who or what is setting the pace in your working life. This postcard is an invitation to you to question what's contributing to frantic days and how you work to slow things down when you need to focus.

What I'm thinking of here is looking at your day or your week and really thinking about what were the meetings, the conversations, the emails, the DMs, whatever it is, that made a big difference on the day or made a big impression, had a big impact. It might be that you had quite a productive day, but then at the end of the day, a really stressful meeting or a conversation with a colleague or co-worker that didn't quite sit right and that somehow stayed with you. Or it might be that you're in a cycle of big deliverables, big meetings, big deadlines, and that is really determining the shape of your days and of your week. Usually, it's things external to us that set the pace of work and life in a leadership role. And walking both as a metaphor and as a practice or moving through a landscape, whether in physical terms or just in your imagination, is a great tool for finding the right cadence that works for you and setting your own pace as a leader.

Now, finding your cadence starts with intentionality and stepping outside of your usual work to find a fresh perspective. Now, if you are sitting there thinking, "Actually, I really don't have time at all." You know, one very simple way to just step away and just get a moment of mental clarity is just to turn around, even when you're sitting at your desk. Just turn your chair around, look in the other direction. Or maybe get up, get a glass of water, and find a different space to be in, even just for a couple of moments. And you close your eyes or just see in your mind your day or your week and really think about what were the things that made a big difference? What made the pace of things speed up? What slowed down? When did you feel you were going at the pace that you wanted to go at? And when did you feel you had to work faster or harder or differently? When were you kind of jerked off course. When did you have to change direction?

You can do this just by thinking about it or reflect to yourself. Maybe things will come to you quite easily. Maybe it'll be an easy kind of thing to identify for you. Or maybe it wouldn't be. And maybe you want to take a pen and paper and draw a line or squiggly line or whatever you want to symbolize your week and try and map some things that kind of stick in your head. Or maybe look at your diary and take a look at how the week has been shaping up for you, how the day has been shaping up. Has it all been back to back meetings? Are all these meetings equal? Any of them stick out as pace setting meetings, if you like. What would you have preferred to do at a different pace? Was your morning that you set aside to catch up on things suddenly frantic because you got a phone call or an email? Where did the pace of your week run away? Or maybe it's more a question of the pace of your month or even your year.

And the reason why it's useful to consider that is that digital tools and working in hybrid or fully online settings give us the impression that every piece of time that we have, every blank piece of time that's in our diary somehow needs to be filled up. And many individuals in a leadership position, myself included, end up with calendars that are just full from the start of the day until later on and often are booked or sometimes. There's just no control over how many things you have to do in a given day. And I want you to take a moment to really consider if there's any parts of where your control lies, whether that's a one-to-one meeting or catch up, whether that's any group meetings, any other time where you maybe have some flexibility. And this is where actual physical walking can come in as a tool to reset a bit of a context. So maybe you have a regular one-to-one with someone. Maybe you could move that to be a walking meeting. Or maybe there is a hanging out session for your team online. Maybe that could be a little walk where you all do walks maybe in your individual locations or maybe if you're co-located you could head out together.

I'm playing with the idea of walking both on a conceptual level. So imagining your day or your week or your month as a walk and becoming aware of what is speeding up, what is contributing to stress or frantic or hectic days, how can you slow things down when you need to. And at the same time, I want you to use those insights that you gain if you imagine your week as a walk and what or who is setting the pace to identify opportunities to actually change the pace of your day, whether that is an actual walk and talk meeting on an individual or team basis, or whether that's something for you to sort of conceptually, mentally imagine a change of pace or a step change in your day or in your week where you say, okay, I have like two days of busy meetings back to back. I can't change that. But maybe then on the next day in the afternoon, I'm going to change the pace of my week and I'm going to have a 90 minute block where I'm going to have blocked it in my diary. I'm not going to do any meetings. I'm going to have some time to focus on a piece of work or maybe even go for a walk and reflect and catch up with myself and make notes or whatever it might be. Some of the practical limitations in terms of walking meetings always apply. It's always a good idea not to spring this on people and give plenty of notice.

There's also a consideration of how to make this activity if you are indeed physically going for a walk and talk meeting inclusive and be sure to consider how or what the impact might be. There's lots of how-to guides on walking meetings out there. But I think more crucially, it's important to think about why you'd want to use it and how you could use it and how it could help provide a little bit of a let up of the usual pace of digital productivity that many people will be adhering to all the time. And also giving an opportunity to maybe do some

team building. You don't necessarily have to be co-located. I've done really successful walks with a distributed team where everybody went for a walk, whether indoors or outdoors, wherever they were. And we shared little DM chats or maybe even took pictures of something whilst we were walking to share that experience. Or similarly, you could have a one-to-one walk and talk where you each walk in your own location and just use headphones or a good old-fashioned phone call if you wanted to try walking and talking. Walking meetings are a really great tool to build trust with co-workers or find a way to refresh and reframe a tricky situation or simply have a bit of quality time together, whether you're co-located or remotely. And having a little play with walking, whether conceptually or practically as walk and talk meetings will help you build some better awareness of what or who is setting the pace in your working life.

And crucially, what you would like that pace to be. Is your leadership practice, is your role as a leader progressing on a day-to-day basis as you'd like to? Is it a conducive pace or are you feeling out of step with where you'd like to ideally be? And what sort of expectations do you have of your own pace? Is it something more where you're expecting yourself to kind of run a marathon or week long? Or are you having little sprints throughout the week and then slowing down to have a different cadence and gain energy and recoup? What are you expecting of yourself when it comes to the pace of your week and the work that you're doing? I think you can probably tell from this recording and the topic this month that I'm a huge fan of all things walking. I find it a really helpful way to think through working paces, how I'd like to work, when I feel most productive, but also get some headspace when I really need to focus on things.

And in this month's post on the course site, I've included a couple of free practical resources that you could have an experiment with. One is a guided reflective coaching book and one is a talk called Critical Cadence. I gave an event last year where you can have a look at and that comes with resources and some ideas around how to develop digital capabilities and digital literacies in terms of digital productivity as well. I've also included an article which I feel is really relevant to this which is called When Do We Actually Need to Meet in Person? And I've included that article because I think it's a really great articulation of why spending time with people in person is so valuable at times.

And I think I thought this would be more helpful to kind of think about when it comes to the pace of our week and when do we actually make time to really focus on a person, give them our whole attention and really be present with them. And I'm hoping that this is one of the things that this postcard this month gets you to think about rather than kind of including a sort of how to do a walking and talking meeting. If you do have any practical questions around that, feel free to get in touch. Always happy to chat through ideas. But I would really like to invite you to have a look at that article if you haven't read it before. Now, this is the topic for this month. This is your postcard for this month. And I'm very curious to hear how you get on reimagining your week as a walk or where you might go if you do take a walk and talk meeting or a reflective walk on your own or with a colleague. And I'm curious where you might go and where your feet may take you. Thank you so much for being part of Long Distance Leadership Postcards and look out for a new postcard and the next topic at the start of next month.