

## The Leadership Journey *Leading Through Grief and Sorrow*



I have always been intrigued by the “circle of life.” On June 13, 2008 I found myself standing smack dab in the middle of it. I was entering Auburn Memorial Hospital to pay a visit to our son and his fiancé who were giving birth to our first grandchild when I learned about the death of legendary political journalist Tim Russert. I am a news junkie so this hit me like a ton of bricks. I felt as if a member of my family passed away.

As the weekend progressed I continued to watch the coverage of Russert’s death. I was impressed by his colleague’s ability to perform as highly effective leaders while experiencing the loss of a close colleague and friend. Isn’t it interesting that leaders don’t get to stop leading in the midst of their own grief and sorrow?

I’ve recently mentored leaders who are in the throws of grief. I learned from this experience leading a team through grief requires some planning on the part of the leader. There are things leaders can do for themselves and employees to make this a time of productivity even when hearts are breaking. It helps to talk with employees about the dynamics of grief. When a leader acknowledges the impact of grief on themselves and a team, people are more willing to communicate what they need to be productive as they work through their sorrow.

Find creative ways to support grieving employees. Reassure them they will have access to internal and external support to sustain the quality of their work. Demonstrate confidence in employees. It helps to know the leader believes in them even when they are down. Employees benefit from being reminded of other times they were successful during a difficult time. They can lean on these past experiences to pull through new times of difficulty.

When the leader is faced with grief she or he must make time to grieve too. I observe many a leader attempt to put grief aside while at work. Newsflash! Grief does not get out of the way just because we are leaders; it seems to become part of who we are in the moment. Become a student of your own grief. Once you understand how you are affected days can be orchestrated to work with the grief instead of against it.

June 13, 2008 was a blatant reminder of how leaders must deal with all that happens in the circle of life. Life does follow us to work. I say let us acknowledge this and work together to develop plans for getting through times of death that allow leaders and employees to be human. We can’t avoid grief and sorrow in the workplace. It is best to know this and do what can be done to create environments that ease our pain while we continue to do our work.