

How do we gain momentum in the face of dysfunctional situations?

Lily: You said that you realized that there was some dysfunction in leadership, or in your leadership. How did you come to realize that?

Michael: Well, probably like most of us who realize there's dysfunction. It's easier for us to realize there's dysfunction in other people first.

In fact, this morning, I had a breakfast meeting with a leader that I'm very close to. I sat down and I was explaining to them some challenges that another leader — and almost in the midst of explaining those challenges to them, I had this thought, "Hey! There's some areas there that I can improve also." It's almost as if, in my conversation with this person, somebody held up a mirror and said, "Hey! There's something a little off for you, too."

The type of work that we did, we came into organizations, especially in higher ed, that had experienced significant decline. I mean, double-digit decline in enrollment or in donor development. There was significant concern, in some cases about the viability of the institution.

We would come in and help them rethink processes, and people systems, and models, and even data, and get them back on track. In every situation, the teams were very successful - made significant changes. But along the way, it always gets more chaotic before we start really seeing momentum; before we start seeing significant results.

Lily: It's like the breakdown before the breakthrough, right?

Michael: Exactly! And the thing that baffled me was that people at the highest levels in these organizations wanted the results, but did not realize the amount of work, and the amount of commitment that was going to be required to get to momentum.

I mean, as a young leader, most of the time, I was by far the youngest person in the room. I would sit there at times, I'm sure my jaw on the table saying, "Did you think that you were going to come in and revolutionize this institution to get growing again, and there weren't going to be challenges like those that we're talking about here in the room?"

But seeing that, I realized, as I would go back to my own organization, and I begin questioning and evaluating. Am I doing these same things? Am I taking these same unhealthy

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behaviors into the workplace? In some cases, I was. In some cases, I needed to back up and deal with some things in my past, some painful things in childhood and adolescence, some painful things early in my career. Then that's when we decided, there are tons of people, tens of thousands, if not millions of people all over the world, that need somebody to walk this path with them, too. And we decided we wanted to do that.