

A Part of You is Dying

So now that we understand why we struggle in the world that we live in. We also understand the difference between making decisions that simplify things and making decisions which can complicate things. We've also seen the downward spiral that we navigate almost daily. In this session, we're going to look at what to do about it.

After working with hundreds of leaders all over the world in all types of organizations, we discovered that the answer has to do what matters most. It's the Stephen Covey principle of Big Rocks First in his classic, *First Things First*. It's the ancient scripture which challenges us to first do the things which really matter, and then we'll have time, energy, and capacity to do everything else and see the resulting benefit.

This means making your health, your marriage, your family, your friends, your team, your organization, your place of worship, or your contribution to your community. It means making all of these things top priorities.

Yet every day, we are faced with a significant number of distractions – some overt, some subtle – which threaten to drag us away from these things that we know in our mind – even in our heart and our soul – that are supremely important. Yet we spend time with all kinds of other things instead of these things which we know matter most.

Let me tell you a quick story.

When I was a kid, we lived in a home in Southern Maryland. Behind the home, we had this large wooded area. It went for acres and acres – to us at the time it seemed like miles and miles. We would hike through the woods and discover all kinds of new things. In fact, most of the time our parents thought we were just a few yards from the house. In reality, there were times when we were miles from our home.

One afternoon we were hiking through the woods in this densely wooded area and we came into this clearing, and typically in a clearing like that, you would see a meadow filled with tall grass. And being the young kids that we were, you'd go through the grass and often the grass would be taller than you are. This time it was different. We came into

this clearing and there was nothing in the clearing but sand – probably two or three acres of just sand. All around: pine trees, and cedar trees, and hardwood trees. And in the middle of this clearing was just sand. So, we aptly named the place: Sandy Land.

Day after day and week after week, we would go to Sandy Land and we would play. We would tell our friends we're headed to Sandy Land, meet us there, and we would often race to get to Sandy Land.

Of course, if your parents were like ours, they would tell you, "Hey, I don't want you to ever be outside of earshot. We need to always be able to get a hold of you."

My parents, both of them, had mastered this art of whistling. They had these distinct whistles. In fact, we could tell them apart. We knew which one was calling for us at the time. And we, many times, were out in the middle of the woods in the Sandy Land area, and we would feel like we were so far away, and then we would hear that distinct whistle, and then you realize how close you are when you felt so far away.

Many leaders feel like they're all alone. They're so far from getting it right. We make all these mistakes on a regular basis.

Today, we want to be the whistle in the distance that says, "Though there's some work to do, you're not far away, and you will make it."

Since we began developing the Simple Leadership Spiral more than 10 years ago, it's become the proven path for personal and professional development for leaders and for teams.

When you think about your work, your experience may have been like mine - I've navigated my way through increasingly complex challenges. I started several companies very early in my career. I was thrust into handling conflict and chaos, even betrayal. I had the responsibility of developing people, teams, and organizations even though I was young and early in my career. I grieved painful loss.

Have you ever wished that you just had more time to handle everything that was being thrown at you in life and at work? But the demands at work and at home make it impossible.

Many times, I felt like I was on my own - trying to figure it all out. I felt like no one was experiencing the same thing that I was.

Most people think that the answer to these challenges can be found in reading another book, or going to another conference, or sitting through another training, or hiring different team members, or developing a new plan.

So, we try it. And we only find more confusion, more overwhelm, more complexity.

But what if we could make a few simple, fundamental decisions that would simplify thousands of other decisions for us – foundational concepts that simplify your leadership and dramatically improve energy, clarity, productivity, and fulfillment in your life and in your work.

When we go to work there's all this stuff to do. Then we come home, and there's all this stuff to do. And when we think about people who are most successful, is it because they have the ability to get more done than everyone else?

We'd all say, No. Because there's far more to our work than just doing work – just getting things done.

But all of us want to get better, to grow, to improve. And if we don't know how to find more margin, then we're only going to continue to experience frustration. If we don't know how to find and effectively work with a good coach, we'll only experience more overwhelm. If we don't understand how to take advantage of our current life stage – no matter how young or how old we feel – we'll only experience more stress.

You may have people who are high performers, brilliant, experienced, but at the end of the day, it's the people who make simple, foundational decisions who have the competitive advantage.

We often say at Guidestone that our tools, and our programs, and the things that we speak about – they're like a mirror that shows you what it's like to be on the other side of you. So, when we say every one of us needs help, what we're really saying is that every one of us benefits when we take the time to look into the mirror where we can see that there's something that just doesn't quite look right. Then the question becomes, "Can you take care of it yourself or would it help to have someone to help you with it?"

So, what we're asking you to do is to take a LOOK. To take a look at how you're growing, to look at who is helping you, to look at who is speaking into your life and your work, and to look at how you can give more to serve other people on their journey.

We want to help you get to the place where you are regularly looking in the mirror, seeing what needs to change, and making the necessary adjustments.

We want you to see how you can challenge yourself and where you can say, “Man, I had no idea that I was doing that. No wonder I don't have enough time. No wonder I’ve disconnected from people at work. No wonder I'm struggling at home. I wasn't aware that MY actions and MY behaviors were making my life far more complex than it needs to be.”

If you want to want to simplify your life and work, if you want to rediscover your vision, if you want to reignite your passion, if you want to really love your work, the Six Phases of the Simple Leadership Spiral will help you and take you to a whole different level.

Let's take a look at the Six Phases. First, let me start with a story.

A number of years ago, I was serving as an administrator at a university. I was under enormous pressure to deliver significant growth for the university. My team was feeling the pressure. I kept telling myself that it was just temporary, but at the end of the day, there really was no end in sight.

I'd go to bed at night thinking about everything that needed to be done. I wasn't sleeping well. Then I'd wake up every morning thinking about it. And I kept pushing myself harder and faster.

At the time, I was dealing with some of my own demons. I wasn't spending enough time with my family. My sweet wife was managing our home and managing our daughter on her own. I felt like such a hypocrite – here I was trying to help other people improve and trying to help the university improve, when I was the one that needed to change. It's tough to face your team like that every day.

One afternoon I stood in our kitchen explaining to my wife what I was experiencing – what I was feeling. She listened patiently and supportively like she always does. Then she calmly responded. She said, “Mike, for about six months, I've felt like there's a part of you that's dying, and I don't know if you're ever going to get it back.” My first thought was - if you had told me this six months ago, we could have avoided a lot of pain! But she wanted me to be able to work through the challenges that I was experiencing without the added pressure from her.

The part of me that was dying was my energy for family relationships. The part of me that was dying was my energy and desire for deep, fulfilling work relationships. I just wanted to get away from everything and everyone.

I was stuck.

Let me share with you how the Six Phases helped me during this chaotic time. We use the simple metaphor of the spirals to help us remember and communicate the phases.

The phases of the downward spiral – which as we move down the downward spiral, if we're not able to get out of that downward spiral, they continue to accelerate as we go down until we reach the point of disaster.

We also use it to illustrate the upward spiral – the Simple Leadership Spiral – which accelerates as we move forward because we built things into the early phases, that become foundational to many other decisions that we make.