

STEP OFF THE HAMSTER WHEEL. REGULARLY!

In teamwork, it's natural to want to move forward together — to support your team and deliver what's been agreed. In many organizations, a leader is seen not just as someone who manages, but as someone who gets on the bike and rides alongside the team. A person who doesn't stand on the sidelines watching from a distance, but works shoulder to shoulder, with the same commitment and the same pace.

There's truth in that. A good leader doesn't run from work. They don't sit back with their arms crossed or delegate everything from a distance. They're willing to roll up their sleeves when the team needs it. They jump into the chaos, help deliver, hustle. But a leader also needs to know when — and how — to step off the hamster wheel. Not to check out or walk away from responsibility, but to gain perspective. Because when you're constantly in motion, delivering side by side, extinguishing fires, switching between tasks, you start losing sight of the bigger picture. You see only what's right in front of you — and someone on the team has to see further. Someone has to ask, “Does this still make sense?”, “Are we heading in the right direction?”, “Are we missing something important?”

”

To lead well, you need time to pause. To see what's working and what's not. To decide what to reinforce, and what might need to be let go. To notice what can't be seen in constant motion. Reflection is one of the most important tools a leader has. And I'm not talking about some heavy strategic deep dive. I mean a simple, intentional moment of stillness — a breath, a glance in the mirror, a chance to ask: “What's happening here?”, “Is this working?”, “What does my team need?”, “What role am I playing right now?” It's a moment where you stop doing and start seeing — and that, despite appearances, doesn't happen by accident.

Reflection isn't a luxury. It's not something you allow yourself when your schedule suddenly clears up. It needs to have its place in your calendar. Because if you don't make time to reflect, no one in your team will either. A good leader isn't someone who always gets it right — but someone who can pause, look at their decisions, and say: “That didn't work — what now?” Someone who's not afraid to admit they acted too fast, too harshly, or without enough information — and who then turns that insight into action. Into a conscious choice. Into change.

Maybe you've read my piece on intersections and roundabouts. To move forward, you first have to see what's holding you back. What patterns you're stuck in. What fears keep you holding the wheel so tightly. What makes you run around that metaphorical intersection with a traffic baton in hand. What's making it hard for you to create space where others could take more ownership. These questions won't ask themselves. You have to ask them. And to do that, you have to step off the wheel.

Reflection is also about skills. What don't I know yet? What do I want to develop? Who could I talk to? What should I read? What area could I expand to make things easier for the team? This isn't a race. You don't have to be ready for everything. But it helps to know what's worth working on. Just the act of stopping to ask — already shifts something.

I know managers who've been running their meetings the same way for years. Same structure. Same questions. Same rhythm. And they're content with that. "Why change what works?" they say. But how do they know it works, if they've never taken the time to step back and really look? Reflection is the moment where you ask, "Does this still make sense?" — and only then can you realize that maybe it could be better.

One of my mentors had a habit I still admire. Every Friday, he'd block off twenty minutes in his calendar for what he called a "reflective twenty." He would review his week: what worked, what didn't, which decisions had value, and which weren't necessary. He'd take notes and come back to them a month later to see if he was really growing. It wasn't a radical move — but it was consistent. And because it was consistent, it worked.

I have my own checklist. I start with myself: Was it a good week? Did I take care of myself? Was I present? Then I move to the team: Does everyone know where we are? Does someone need more attention? Is something getting stuck? A once-a-year reflection changes nothing. A weekly one? That's fifty chances to adjust course. To be a little more attentive. A little more thoughtful. A little better.

DAKOWSKI

Imagine you're rolling out a new process. At first, it works well. After a few weeks, it starts falling apart. An average manager shrugs and says, "That's normal — everything wears down over time." But a reflective leader asks, "Is this still working? What can we adjust? Do we need to go back and redesign it?" And if needed, they tell the team, "Let's rebuild this." That's what reflection enables — the courage to shift direction when the situation calls for it.

So make room for that courage. Block the time. No meetings. No rush. Just you, a notebook, and the right questions. You don't need an hour. Sometimes twenty or thirty minutes is enough. But you do have to step off the hamster wheel — because that's where real leadership begins.