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## Our Power of Togetherness

**T**he prevailing winds these days seem to perpetually swirl. A world of hope, a world of worry, triumph and tragedy, a lingering pandemic, and now even that “R” word looming over us—like the threat of an economic storm front.

How long, how strong—who knows? Yet during all the gusts and gales, we need to keep our center and find our balance point.

For me, paradoxically perhaps, that’s one local grocery store, six cans of soup, and 27 months ago.

It was the early days of the pandemic. Life as we knew it just seemed to come to a stop. We feared for our health, for our loved ones. Uncertainty and fear clouded the sky. There were so many dreary days and questions—so much we didn’t know. Could we even touch anything?

I remember that checkout line as if it all happened yesterday. My wife, Leslie, and I were standing behind an elderly woman with six cans of minestrone soup in her cart—and nothing else. “I’m sorry,” the cashier said. “We have a limit. You can only get four.”

Overhearing the conversation, Leslie spoke up: “Don’t worry, I’ll buy the other two for her.” Immediately, the man behind us said loudly, “Count me in for four more!”

Seeing the woman’s nearly empty shopping cart, people in that checkout line asked the woman what else she might need. By the time she left the store, the woman had all the essentials she needed—including supplies that other shoppers cheerfully took out of their own carts.



Since then, this story has become my parable of those times—and these times—a poignant point of learning. It is my level set, recalibrating and reminding me that the smallest of lights can be a beacon in darkness. This shared humanity is our better selves—our insatiable need for togetherness.

This story also reminds me that commonalities can overshadow differences even in a world in which left seems further left and right seems further right. Korn Ferry’s research suggests that a company’s journey from individual self-interest to shared community interest entails many steps, including a collective purpose, a compelling vision, individual and joint fairness, accountability and responsibility, and recognition. The starting point? We all want to be part of something bigger than ourselves.

Make no mistake, togetherness is not necessarily about a location; it’s all about intention. No matter where we are, no matter how we work, we need to rediscover the connection points that resonate.

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## “Commonalities can overshadow differences even in a world in which left seems further left and right seems further right.”

For more than two years, we’ve done our best. When we come together virtually, though, it’s always about something. However, when we gather in person, particularly by happenstance, it’s sometimes about nothing—but the result is always something! And there is something really impactful about observing and absorbing together.

It’s up to the leader to help ensure that happens. Whatever the new world of work becomes, we can find this balance. Always and everywhere, it’s community, connectivity, and culture.

We’ve always known intuitively about the importance of these 3Cs, but we never really made them a conscious focus. Like everyone,

we assumed it all happened organically—with places to go, people to see. Then togetherness became inorganic—only happening with deliberate action. It’s a shame that it takes those times, when the you-know-what is hitting the fan, for this awareness to truly inform how we think and feel about being together.

As leaders, we’re the fulcrum of that balance: on one hand understanding people’s concerns and answering their questions, and on the other hand helping them to relate better to each other.

The direction may change but the winds will always blow. And while we can’t control the storms—neither in life nor in leadership—togetherness is what adjusts our sails. ▀