

A Walk in The Walk

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By Margarett Purvis

1st Call: 7am.
 4th Call: 8am.
 Race downstairs to give out last business card.
 Race upstairs to make another call. Start edits on presentations.
 Get interrupted seven times with more calls, IM's, an email littered with silliness from someone

who should know better and then back to edits. A quick read of what's before me, followed by a long pause. What I'm reading doesn't feel like me or what I want to say. Something is off. I get up. I open the curtains. There is sunshine. I am surprised. The weather man said that my temporary office in Florida would see rain every day of LEI's Lean Summit. The job the humidity is doing on my hair says he's right. My eyeballs confirm he's wrong. I grab my sneakers and RUN to the door, before what I see morphs into a cruel mirage. I can't remember my last walk in sunny, WARM weather. With every step I take I feel better. I think about the last couple of weeks. Anxiety over the Farm Bill was more taxing than I cared to admit or even truly recognized. I decide to release that and focus on how awesome I felt when the governor's office called about how he would strategically use \$6 million to save \$457 million in SNAP benefits for the people we serve. In that moment I noticed I had been holding my breath. It was nice to finally enjoy taking in NEW oxygen.

With every step in an unfamiliar community, good feelings are returning. I start reminding myself that not everything was bad in the past few weeks. I think about the great support my team and I enjoyed from so many unlikely places. I think of groups not typically defined as hunger advocates proving themselves to be the DEFINITION of authentic partners, leaders even...some of the best a cause could have. I think of how some of my new friends have helped me see old stresses with reNEWed eyes. I think about supporters who have used their access on behalf of New Yorkers they will never meet, without any prodding, all because it was simply the right thing to do!

Every day at Food Bank we face a new normal. The demands and requirements to meet the needs of the New Yorkers we serve become greater. The leadership our mission requires can't be faked, dialed in or assumed. The struggle to afford food is owned by far too many New Yorkers. Stacking our team with the right leaders and partners is not a preference but a requirement. Not because one CEO says so or five people disagree, but because 1.5 million New Yorkers and the city they call

home DESERVE a different approach to ending hunger. When having a job (or two) is no longer the answer to staving off hunger, concerned people must answer the universal urging to ensure we're asking the right question. Yesterday's effort and response are both out of touch and out of order for those seeking to be called leader IN THIS SPACE.

As I cross the street to return to my hotel, it hits me. My pace quickens as I think, "Get it together, sister. You're here for a reason!" We've spent the last year working on a strategy to reduce the meal gap. In it, we said, leadership would be key and now we have a governor who lead in the way we needed, and we've been gifted with a national stage to describe our experience with a best in class corporate partner. At this point, my pace is bordering on a skip as I remembered the major lesson from the past few weeks. I'm not wrong to expect passion and commitment from those receiving mail in our shared trenches. Who knows? Maybe as I'm celebrating and touting the corporate culture and employees of Toyota and the gift that Kaizen has been to Food Bank's network, there could be a corporate leader in the audience who needs to hear our story and better understand that by coupling humility with skillsets, an interested person can actually be HELPFUL and viewed as an ACTUAL leader...not just an assigned one.

As my hotel gets closer my feelings and message become clearer. A new normal, no matter how taxing doesn't have to be all bad. For every challenge, there is an opportunity for a new leader, friend or supporter to make themselves known. Just as the sun I enjoyed was not expected, one never knows the blessing waiting around the next corner. I'm grateful for the chance to enjoy a walk in OUR walk and will keep the faith needed for the next steps.

*Margarette Purvis is the President and CEO of Food Bank For New York City.
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