

## Are You Tired of the Rat Race?

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- - a monthly reflection on the imaginative challenges facing leaders today

Leadership usually doesn't mean sprinting: it's more like a marathon. Leaders need stamina and determination, and the willingness to stay in the race. But leadership is also a relay. We receive the baton from someone who went before, and we'll hand it off to someone else.

Keeping that fact in mind can help us maintain perspective on how far we've gotten. If we feel like we're behind, we may be affected by some challenges bequeathed to us by our predecessors. If we feel like we're doing great, it's in part due to the strengths of those who went before. If we are starting something brand-new, we can remember our hopes for those who come after, and start thinking about the future and planning for succession.

But just like a relay race, the leadership handoff is important. Transitions from one leader to another are key times for any institution. We can never control how another leader functions, but we can pay attention to ourselves so we don't trip, or trip up someone else. We can be aware of our own vulnerability to loss and transition (wanting to hang on too long, or wanting to get out as quickly as possible) and do our best to set boundaries where appropriate, and stay connected where we need to.

When we are in the middle of our run, we can get farther by focusing on our own functioning without blaming others who went before (or those currently in the race with us). We can pay attention to our own part in the race right now. We do need to keep the end of the race in view, but we shouldn't get distracted from the steps we ourselves need to take today. This doesn't mean we ignore those who have gone before. We can look for times to invite living predecessors back to connect the institution with the race as a whole, or ask about stories that need to be told, to give ourselves and others energy to keep persevering. Obstacles overcome in the past may inspire us in the present.

And we remember that the race doesn't end with us. Reminding everyone that our tenure is not forever (not threatening to leave, but being honest about the future) can help those we lead to think bigger about the future, and become less dependent on our leadership.