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Fly like an EAGL!

I am heading to Austin, Texas shortly.

I'm going to assist my brother, Chris (president of Robinson Nursery Inc.), and his wife, Marie (marketing director at Robinson), in finishing the capstone course for Dr. Charlie Hall's EAGL program (Executive Academy for Growth and Leadership). For those of you who haven't heard about this program, it is somewhat similar to a master's degree in nursery business management.

I have had the opportunity to join Chris for a couple of the classes, and they have been nothing short of profound. The quote that comes to mind is, "What got us here isn't what's going to get us to where we are going. So, what are we doing now to be prepared for what we need to accomplish, to get us where we want to go?"

When he signed up for the class, I thought that we had already bitten off more than we could chew. But, as with most things with our company, it doesn't matter. We need to continuously invest our time, energy, and resources to move our people, processes and products out of their comfort zones. A big step like enrolling in this program is the epitome of that. We need to find a way to be OK with being uncomfortable.

A key component of the EAGL program involves creating a one-page plan to serve as the guiding compass for our business. This plan has our values and how we define them, the company's overall mission, our 15-year vision (long-term vision), how we segment our customers, and our value propositions. It also includes a short-term strategic plan, financial metrics, and critical financial ratios so that we can measure our progress against past performances.

As a result of this process, we will end up with a simplified game plan for our operation that can be referenced as we go. It's there to drive our business decisions and enforce the accountability needed to ensure our progress is linked, aligned, and focused.

We must always remember to stop and ask ourselves: What are we doing to progress our businesses, outside of the day-to-day operations? It's easy to get caught up in priorities as they shift from area to area and season to season. But aside from putting out daily fires, it's important to ask: are you intentionally driving your company towards its goals and mission?

Here's the way we like to put it: Are we working ON the business, or are we working IN the business? As leaders, we need to do both — clearly — but the greatest emphasis should be working ON the business.

A big part of this journey was committing to becoming a Lean company first. The Peters Company has played a pivotal role in our ability to implement Lean concepts and make them sustainable. They offer services that transform companies. I tie the Lean efforts into this program because we now have a policy deployment process. That is a very similar management/leadership style to the one-page plan, but it is more accessible.

Throughout the EAGL program, Chris was trained to ask himself, do we have 3-5-year goals? Do we have a mission statement? As he began the EAGL journey, these were issues we had to discover. We had an idea of what the answers would be, but they were tucked away and visited on a limited basis. I believe that anyone that takes the concepts from this program and applies them to their business will be more successful.

I encourage you to investigate the EAGL program. It will, without a doubt, take you from good to great. ☺



Josh Robinson