

Foreword

A Life of Managing by Wandering Around

A Tribute to the "Larry Lens"

Managing things by wandering around came naturally to Larry Frase, coauthor of the original *School Management by Wandering Around*. After having travelled with Larry and his lovely wife, Maria, on trips to Portugal and New Zealand, and watching how Larry was an itinerant learner, how he let his curiosity about things go where they led him, and how he framed his observations after those incursions, I realized this was a man who was open to being amazed, amused, and absorbed.

In retrospect, I think there was a lot of Larry in that first book, perhaps more than he actually was aware. Also, I think a leader who is successful with the idea of managing by wandering around has to suspend prestructuring everything so that he or she only sees what the structure lets in. Being open means not imposing too many conscious filters and trying to come to understand the unconscious ones that can be attributed to culture, gender, language, and past lived histories.

Successful managing by wandering around is allowing oneself to be playful and supple, fluid, and without too much regard for the system one is in. Managing by Wandering Around is not for compulsive rule followers. It means seeing through your own lens but also seeing around those same lenses. It means allowing yourself to be curious and to avoid

the requirement that everything has to have some larger and immediate purpose, or not insisting that meaning must always be known first, before observation.

One good test for the leader doing MBWA is the “Larry lens.” The “Larry lens” is to just go with the flow (and flow was one of Larry’s favorite academic pursuits) and see the paradoxes, contradictions, and humor in situations. When Larry found such intersections in his travels, he would retain their complexity through humor. He had a natural way of mimicking speech of those he found to be profound and profane. If one can find something to laugh about in the human condition, I think one is beginning to deal with the gray space between all of the blacks and whites framed by theory. Humor is one of the ways we see grey in the world, and it is a way we joke about some of the false blacks and whites of organizational life.

So this is what I remember most about my times with Larry Frase. It was the laughter at the end of the day of wandering around the side streets of little towns on the Douro River of Portugal and driving down such narrow streets in Porto we had to pull in the side-view mirrors or have them sheared off. It was asking for directions and walking the parched dry furrows of the terraced rows of grapevines high above the river and questioning the growers about how and why water was important. It was learning and listening with mind, body, and heart.

I think Bill Streshly and Penny Gray, both of whom knew Larry well, were the right pair to extend “Larry’s lens” in this wonderful revision.

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