

# METROWEST BUSINESS

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## Looking backward to move forward

Fresh off a fabulous family trip to our nation's capital, I have a renewed appreciation for the



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role that history plays in our present and future and for the importance of reflecting on the past and weaving it into our present lives in a relevant way. And like all lessons, this one can be applied to your business communications.

We are programmed to be in the here and now, to answer that text, whip off that email, respond to that daily fire. But sometimes it's more effective to stop and look back before you plow ahead. Here are three ways that looking backward can reap rewards for your professional communications today and tomorrow.

### **Gives you greater perspective**

We all have questions about the laws we follow, the taxes we pay and the elected positions we vote on. In D.C., you can learn the history behind everything we do in this country and some of it is truly fascinating. Some of it is truly bor-

ing, too, according to my teenage daughters – not nearly as exciting as our stop at Georgetown Cupcakes (site of the TLC show “DC Cupcakes”), but that's understandable. While we still may not like the way some things are done, having a deeper understanding of the context helps.

Have you ever wondered why things are done a certain way in your company or your industry? Why your firm is based in a certain city, sells a certain product or offers a certain service arrangement? It's likely that there is a solid reason for everything in your profession or organization and learning the reasons will broaden your perspective. It will also help you to communicate to new hires, prospects and customers in a knowledgeable way.

### **Shows the power of the people**

Washington, D.C. highlights the fact that change happens because people demand it, and not always the most powerful people. From a quiet demonstration at a lunch counter to encourage desegregation to the surprising elections that have made loud statements to legislators, the power of the

people is celebrated in the museums and monuments throughout D.C.

In the business world, change often happens because customers or employees demand it. That's why it's critical as a communicator to keep your finger on the pulse of your constituents, to understand what they like and don't like about doing business with you, and to respond to their needs by changing when times or circumstances demand it. It's also important to validate your audience by explaining that a change is happening because of their valued feedback.

### **Inspires leadership and sacrifice**

I was overwhelmed several times during our trip with the incredible sacrifice that so many people have made, particularly the military and their families, so that we can enjoy the freedoms we do. One afternoon we were walking down the sidewalk when another tourist came toward us wearing a T-shirt with a derogatory message about President Barack Obama. My daughter Alison commented on it to me, and I reminded her that a lot of people have sacrificed a lot so

that we have the power of free speech and the right to wear what we want.

Our country has been blessed with many incredible leaders and heroes and their stories inspired me to be better and do better. In your career, organization and industry, do you celebrate the leaders? Weaving the stories of a visionary company founder, an innovative industry leader or an unsung employee into your firm's story can be a powerful way to inspire not only your employees but also your customers and counterparts.

My daughter Erin said she would never remember everything she saw in D.C. because there was just so much to absorb. But I'm hopeful that it will come back to her and her sister in bits and pieces while listening to a class lesson, reading a book or watching the news – and that they'll take a little bit of that history into their own future.

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