



What Do You Do With Disappointment?

Today I got a no. And it hurt.

We have been unsuccessful in a funding application for something I believe deeply in. We put a huge amount of work into it and, for reasons I won't go into here, I came away feeling frustrated that the decision hadn't been made with the whole picture in front of them.

My immediate reaction? I was gutted. I don't think there's anything wrong with admitting that. Leadership doesn't somehow make you immune to disappointment. You don't read an email or take a phone call like that, shrug your shoulders and immediately turn it into a lesson about resilience. At least I don't.

I'm frustrated and disappointed. I went back over conversations in my head. What could I have said differently? What should I have been asked?

Another thought occurred to me.

What do you do with disappointment when the people walking through our door don't have the luxury of you staying disappointed?

That question is front of mind as I write this.

This has been quite a week. On Tuesday I spoke with someone expressing thoughts of suicide. Then sat with a man living on the streets who seemed completely despondent about what his future might look like. I made him a coffee and some vegemite toast as we spoke. Something very simple but deeply appreciated. In the afternoon, I spoke with a woman who has found herself, for the second time, in a relationship involving family and domestic violence. The relationship has ended, but the fear is very real and very present. She is frightened of what her former partner might do next. We managed to find some support for a short period of time.

And then, at the other extreme, I've experienced some of the very best of our community.

Our oven at The Spiers Centre finally died after 18 years. We put out a simple request asking whether anyone could help. Within 24 hours, an oven had been donated and a local electrical company had offered to install it for free.

Today I've spoken with a local café about our ethos of *Community Supporting Community*, and they want to join us by providing food.

Those moments are joyous. They keep you going. Not because an oven or some donated food suddenly fixes everything we see, but because they remind you that the community cares.

Perhaps that's why the disappointment of the funding decision landed so heavily. In this job, the emotional distance between hope and despair can sometimes be extraordinarily small. One minute somebody is telling you something about their life that stays with you long after they've left the building. The next, someone rings and says, "We can help." Then an email arrives saying, "Unfortunately..."

All before lunch.

At the moment, I'm looking for positives, and perhaps that's what community-sector leadership is? Not having all the answers, not being endlessly resilient, not becoming immune to the things you hear or the disappointments that come your way.

The positive is learning what to do with them.

Resilience doesn't mean not feeling disappointed. I think it means being disappointed and still turning up, admitting that something hurt without allowing that hurt to become the end of the story.

Today, I am disappointed.

I think about what might have been possible if that answer had been yes. I don't think there is anything wrong with saying that.

But tomorrow the doors at The Spiers Centre will open at 9am, as always. Someone will walk through them. The phone will ring. We will answer it with "Hello".

Whoever is on the other end won't know about today's disappointment. They won't know how much work went into it. They won't know about the meeting, or the way I thought the meeting was supposed to go or the email that landed afterwards.

They'll just know that they need some support and that puts disappointment into perspective very quickly. It doesn't make the disappointment disappear.

It just reminds you that you have something more important to do with it than sit in it. So we'll try another door. Someone will surprise us by saying, "We can help."

So what do you do with disappointment when the people walking through your door don't have the luxury of you staying disappointed? You feel it, learn from it and you keep opening the door.

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