

Dear Future CEO,

There's something I hope you remember as your world gets bigger: Don't become so focused on reporting results that you stop leading the people who produce them.

The higher you climb, the more people will want something from you. The board. Investors. Your ELT. Customers. Partners. There will always be another set of numbers to review, another presentation to prepare, another meeting where you need to explain the results. Do all of that. Do it well.

Just don't disappear.

I've watched leaders get the bigger office and the bigger job and, without realizing it, start experiencing the organization through a computer screen and the people closest to them.

Years ago, while coaching a business president, he said something to me privately that I've never forgotten: "Monica, it's lonely at the top." He told me people didn't behave the same around him anymore. They filtered what they said. Sometimes they told him what they thought he wanted to hear instead of what he needed to know.

I understood what he meant. But I've come to believe something else too: It doesn't have to be lonely at the top.

Don't wait for the truth to make its way up to you. Go find it. Get out of the office. Walk the floor. Visit the field. Hold the town hall. Shake hands. Sit with people several levels below you and ask, "What should I know?" Then listen. Really listen.

Let people see you leading. Not just your board. Not just your ELT. Your people. They should know where you're taking them, what you care about and that you understand what you're asking of them. And they should know they can tell you something you may not want to hear.

Managing up matters. But at the top, leadership is 360 degrees. Up. Down. Across. Out.

You can learn a lot from a dashboard. You can learn even more standing next to the person whose work created the number on it. So prepare the presentation. Know the metrics. Walk into that boardroom ready.

Then walk back out.

Your organization is waiting for you to lead it.

See you at the top.

Monica