

The Power of Rituals

Part I:

Spend some time looking at your current seasons and the rituals you have in place. Which of them help us bring our humanity to the work we do.

The Life Cycle Markers: How do you currently celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, and departures? What changes, if any, would you like to make?

The Seasonal Rhythm of the school year:

- *Pre-Semester:* How do you help your team "fuel up"?
- *Busy Seasons:* How do you "check in"?
- *Post-Semester Start:* How do we "decompress" while still serving students?
- *Summer:* How do we celebrate the harvest, while preparing for the season of growing?

Part II: The Leader's Reflection

Spend some time looking at your past to reflect on where you are and where you want to go.

The "Doing" Audit

- Looking back at your career, have you been living in a constant time of doing and advancing?
- What has been the "cost" of that pace (personally or professionally)?

Part III: Leading with the Rhythm of the Seasons

The Philosophy

"The seasons are more than a budget of mechanical parts; they are a metaphor for the movement of the soul." — Parker Palmer

As you look at the cycle of your work year and your own leadership journey, use the following prompts to align your rituals with the natural rhythm of your team.

Autumn: The Grace of Letting Go

In nature, Autumn is a time of both harvest and decay. It is the necessary preparation for what is to come.

- **The "Stop-Doing" List:** To make room for new growth, what current habit, meeting, or process in your leadership needs to "die or decay"? What is no longer serving its purpose?
- **The Seeds:** Amidst the "letting go," what seeds of future potential are you planting right now through your current interactions?

Winter: The Power of Dormancy

Winter appears stagnant, but it is actually a time of deep, internal preparation. Without rest, there can be no Spring.

- **The Reflection Space:** When in your annual calendar—or at the conclusion of a major project—can you intentionally build in a period of "dormancy"?
- **The Internal Check-in:** How will you protect this time for yourself and your team to ensure you aren't just "human doings" on a treadmill?

Spring: Navigating the Messy Renewal

Spring is beautiful, but it is also muddy and unpredictable. New initiatives often bring growth that makes the day-to-day more difficult.

- **The Messy Middle:** Think of a new initiative you are leading. What "muddy" or difficult day-to-day changes are your team members feeling right now?
- **The Support Ritual:** What can you do for yourself and your team to provide stability while you wait for these new "sprouts" to fully bloom?

Summer: The Abundance of Success

Summer is the season of outward expression. It is a time to bask in the light of what you have achieved.

- **Celebrating the Fruit:** How can you and your team authentically enjoy the success of your hard work? (e.g., A retreat, a public celebration, or a shared milestone).
- **The Transition:** While enjoying the abundance, how are you quietly "gearing up" for the next Fall without cutting the celebration short?

The Manager's Quick-Reference Guide: Seasonal Rituals

Autumn: The Season of Harvest & Letting Go

Focus: Acknowledging what was accomplished and shedding the weight of what didn't work.

- **The "Post-Mortem" Celebration:** At the end of a big project, hold a meeting where you celebrate the wins and then collectively "shred" or delete the old task lists to signify completion.
- **The Chili/Soup Lunch:** (Your example) Bringing a roaster of warm food to campus to mark the "harvest" of the semester's efforts.
- **The "Legacy" Note:** When a staff member moves on or retires, create a "Book of Impact" where colleagues write one thing they learned from that person.
- **The "Stop-Doing" Ceremony:** During a fall retreat, have everyone write one outdated process on a piece of paper and literally toss it into a wastebasket to symbolize letting it go.

Winter: The Season of Dormancy & Reflection

Focus: Protecting the "inner life" and acknowledging the human being behind the employee.

- **The Hand-Written Card:** (Your example) Sending birthday and work anniversary cards to recognize the individual's life journey, not just their job.
- **The "No-Meeting" Week:** Intentionally clear the calendar for the week between semesters to allow for deep work or quiet reflection.
- **The Quarterly Potluck:** (Your example) A social-only gathering to celebrate the birthdays of everyone born in that quarter.
- **The "Quiet Office" Hours:** Dedicating one morning a month where the office door is closed, music is on, and the focus is on personal professional development.

Spring: The Season of Renewal & Messy Growth

Focus: Providing stability and encouragement during the "muddy" transition of new initiatives.

- **The Pre-Semester Grill-Out:** (Your example) Cooking for the staff to "fuel up" before the energy of the students returns.
- **The "Muddy Boot" Award:** A fun, temporary trophy given to the person who is working hardest through the "messy middle" of a new project.
- **The Coffee Huddle:** Short, 15-minute standing meetings once a week to check in on how everyone is handling the stress of new changes.
- **The "First Sprout" Announcement:** Publicly recognizing the very first small win of a new initiative to show the team that growth is actually happening.
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Summer: The Season of Abundance & Light

Focus: Celebrating excellence and connecting the work self to the "home" self.

- **The Annual Retreat:** (Your example) A full day away from the office focused on team-building and high-level visioning.
- **The "Values Champion" Awards:** (Your example) Formal recognition of staff who live the college's values, inviting their families to join for the ceremony.
- **The Professional Development "Road Trip":** Taking the team to a nearby campus or a conference to get outside their bubble and enjoy the "light" of new ideas.
- **The Summer "Half-Day" Friday:** If the college schedule allows, gifting the team a few hours of time back as a "Summer Abundance" thank you.