Lessons From Reinhard: There's Nothing a Walk in Nature Can't Solve

by Cara Martin

Reinhard loved a good walk in the woods. What constituted as "good" was up for debate though. Reinhard was an exceptionally fast walker and his drive in work carried over into his quest for personal fitness. He preferred not to stop until some milestone had been reached – the top of the mountain, the end of the trail, or some other meaningful goal. I would often find myself doing skip steps or light jogging on the occasions when I went walking with him – especially if we were in the airport and not out on the trail.

Despite the fast stride, Reinhard recognized the importance nature offered, not just for physical fitness, but for perspective, space, and clarity. His family will tell you one of his consistent phases was: "There is no problem that can't be solved by taking a long walk in nature." Being outside, and especially amongst the trees surrounded by the forest, you're provided with a sense that there is much more to life than just yourself. Given the space and time to walk in such perspective offers a different frame of mind to think through a problem, whether a technical challenge to brainstorm, a tricky relationship issue to navigate, or a tough conversation to talk out.

Beyond the space to think more freely, Reinhard also found great inspiration from his time outdoors. Nature provided him with a host of ideas to enhance his research in the HVAC sector and we've seen similar inspirations with others across the industry. His walks in West Virginia and observing environmental changes in the area provided him with personal motivation to support energy efficiency, conservation, and greenhouse gas emissions reductions. We worked with partners exploring coatings mimicking the behavior of different insect wings. His favorite, advanced heat exchangers, were inspired by the expansive branching network seen in a tree or the human lung.

Personally, I've always wondered what we can learn from different examples in nature about leadership. While humans are the most advanced species on the planet, we have countless examples to observe and learn from in the natural world. My favorite are the wolves. When they travel in packs, wolves tend to travel in a straight line. The order in line is intentional and designed to support the entire pack. Interestingly, the leader does not walk at the front of the line. Instead, the leader is the very last in line, ultimately responsible for ensuring that everyone in the pack arrives with the rest. No one gets left behind.

If you haven't been outside today, take this newsletter as your reminder to take a pause. Go outside and find some inspiration!