

# THE JOURNEY OF PERSONAL GROWTH

By *The Snack* Editorial Contributor Dan'l Mackey Almy,  
President and Chief Executive Officer, DMA Solutions

I've spent the majority of my career elevating how and why marketing is essential for us to increase the consumption of fresh food. And, believe me, that won't be changing. However, as I stepped back and observed the team working around me, I realized I've surrounded myself with well-equipped, exceptional marketers who are equally as passionate about carrying that narrative forward.

So, in terms of what I could contribute to this industry and our society, I have struggled with the question of "What's next?"

What became abundantly clear to me was the importance of personal growth or, more specifically, personal growth in the role of leadership. Because of the vast information and resources

available, we have an extraordinary opportunity to present ourselves as more self-knowledgeable and aware than the leaders who got us this far. I have to remind myself that success doesn't have to be determined by the roles or titles that preceded me.

Allow me to give you some insight into why this topic is so important to me.



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-Dan'l Mackey Almy, President and Chief Executive Officer, DMA Solutions

This year, DMA Solutions will celebrate 18 years of supporting and elevating fresh produce brands in our industry. This is something I'm extremely proud of. However, when I look back at the first half of those 18 years, I was solely focused on being the best marketer on behalf of our clients and our industry. While this certainly isn't a bad thing, it wasn't until our company began to grow in size that I started to realize the risk of only focusing on the work. I realize now my leadership was creating a culture issue, though I'm not sure I even knew what “culture” or “leadership” were eight years ago.

But, I did know there was a problem, and I knew in order to fix it, I had to start with me.

I decided to conduct team evaluations and to start with myself. I knew I wasn't perfect, but we were producing great work as a team, and I thought we all got along fairly well. I didn't see any glaring red flags. That is until I received my evaluation with a 26 percent approval rating.

Twenty-six percent.

Now sure, I scored high in other areas relating more to my work and abilities, but as a leader, I scored 26 percent. So, what did this tell me? People were willing to follow me, but they weren't

flourishing or reaching their fullest potential as a result of my leadership. And that wasn't okay with me.

Looking back, that approval rating (as well as a combination of other personal struggles occurring at the same time) was one of the most major shifts not only in my career, but in my personal life as well. I could have ignored the feedback, but I didn't. I decided to do something about it. I put down the business books I was studying and picked up personal growth resources to guide me and our company. I dove into books by Brené Brown, podcasts like *EntreLeadership*<sup>®</sup>, and resources like the Enneagram to better understand myself and those I was leading.

I didn't know where to start, but I started.

I practiced and applied some of these new tools and will be the first to admit that sometimes I got it right, and sometimes I got it really wrong—seriously, let's grab a cocktail and I'll share all the stories about the times I got it really wrong.

Sometimes the journey was a wonderful time of self-discovery, and sometimes it hurt like hell. Putting in the work isn't easy; it requires vulnerability, self-reflection, patience, and grace for yourself and others.

What I'm trying to say is, I stumbled through it. But, I realized it doesn't have to come from a place of struggle for everyone. Leaders can choose this journey instead of being pushed toward it, like I was, with a low approval rating.

To me, leadership is a decision and a commitment—not an anointed position. And to be honest, I chased that “anointed position” for years thinking when I got there, I would have “arrived.” But what I've realized is there is no finish line. The pursuit of “better” is a journey, not a destination. Once leaders understand that, the tide begins to turn.

I'm passionate and excited about seeing this conversation heightened in our society and am hopeful to have it heightened within our industry. While I care about the work we do, I care more about us being better humans. Because when we're better humans, we're better marketers, we're better leaders, we're better family members, and we're better friends.

We can't be all of those things without a commitment to being better every day.

So, what is to come?

Eight years later and we're still finding new resources and learning new things. I'm excited to share those with you all soon. 🍷



**DAN'L MACKEY ALMY**

The President and Chief Executive Officer's passion for fresh produce has paved the way for her dynamic career in the industry for over 25 years. In 2004, she founded DMA Solutions, a leading marketing agency that exclusively serves the fresh produce industry. Dan'l and the team of marketers at DMA provide solutions to increase demand for fresh produce in pursuit of creating a positive impact on society.