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Developing Tomorrow's Talent:
a girl, a blog, and thirty days
to business impact

Why Developing People is Accenture's Business

A team leader receives a call from the client at the end of the business day, demanding major changes in the work product. Deadline extension? Not a chance. As he and his team dig in, and as he cancels his other meetings, he asserts his assumptions on having time for people development:

No Time 1*

It's clear that people development is important – but, the team lead says, he has no time for it. At least not until the changes are finished.

He's making several assumptions about people development:

- Serving the client must be the only priority at this time
- People development means

performance reviews, mentoring meetings, and other formal interactions separate from the task at hand

- People development serves various individual, team, and institutional long-term goals, but has little direct connection to the immediate goal of serving the client
- In other words, the hypothetical team leader assumes that people development goals must be balanced against the goal of serving the client, rather than contributing to serving the client. That it is "on top of" doing business, rather than "how we do business."

Do you recognize these assumptions in yourself? How about the rest of your company?

It's easy to relegate "people development" to a low priority. After all, operating the business and creating value are urgent needs that demand our attention. There's rarely a deadline around developing people... until it's too late.

In the scenario described above, what would happen if the team leader continuously acts according to those assumptions?

Why Developing People is Accenture's Business

Over time, the likelihood is that these people will not want to work for him. They'll be tired, demotivated, and disengaged. That's disastrous for the business and for the client. So in the medium to long-term, as his team members lose productivity and maybe even leave the team or the organization, he's not doing his client any favors. He's doing them a disservice.

In this next video, the panellists are operating from a different set of assumptions. They don't see people development as something done "in addition" to getting the work done – they see it as integral to how one does get the work done.

No Time 2*

In summary, in Accenture we believe that:

- People development that only happens "after the work is done" is not real people development
- A team that is being developed every day is better able to handle the most challenging times
- It is during the challenging times, and not after the work is done, that a leader's feedback and support matter most.

We cannot just add "develop people" to our to-do list and check it off when we're done. We need to integrate developing our people into

everything we do. Every interaction, every conversation, and every piece of work is an opportunity to develop our people. As we operate the business and create value for our internal and external clients, developing our people enables us to reach higher performance.

In other words, at Accenture it's not something we do in addition to our business. "Developing People Is our Business".

This was the business problem I wanted to solve, moving our people from seeing people development as something that happens after the work is done, to something that is integral to accomplishing the work. A belief shift, rather than a skill development need.

Part of the paradigm shift was around the amount of time available for people development. Leaders saw it as time-consuming, taking them away from the business for an hour or more at a time. We needed leaders to view people development as multiple, very short "micro-actions" on-the-job. Actions which build trust, engagement and productivity when applied little and often.

Previously, we had successfully used Socratic Dialogues* as one way to achieve this shift, where people have their own aha moments in dialogue with their teams about people development. Those aha moments shifted beliefs, and with them also behaviours.

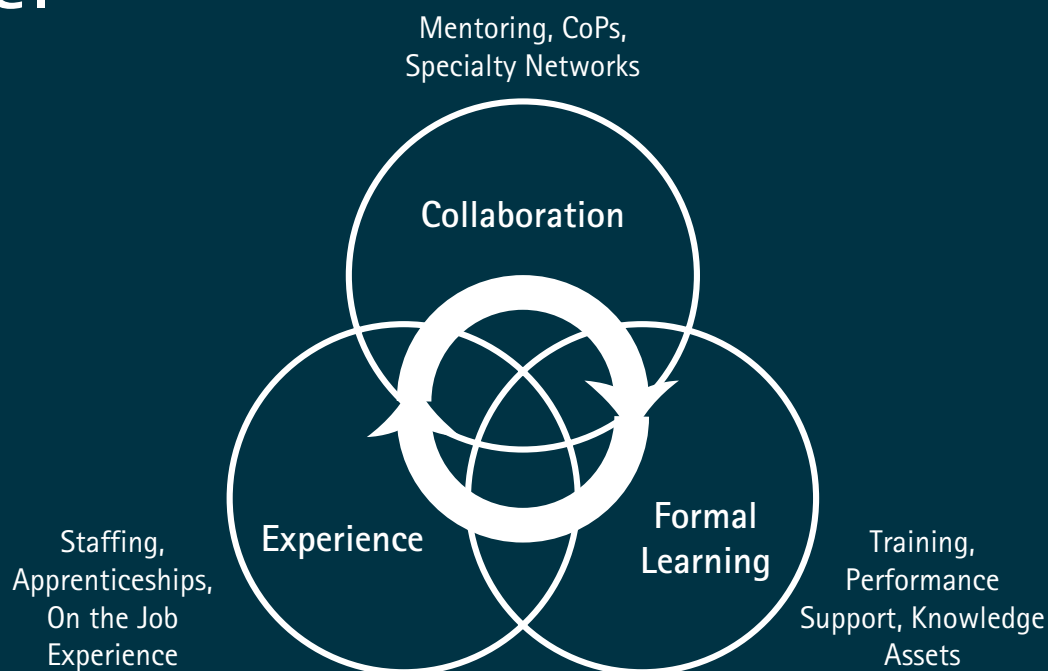
The question for me was how to build on that success, and how to model the micro-action philosophy.

The continuous learning model differentiates Accenture. It is driven by formal learning, collaboration (interacting with peers and experts) and on-the-job experience.

So I really wanted to design a learning experience that fit into the on-the-job experience part of our continuous learning model. Something that would get people to apply their learning right there on the job, rather than having to translate what they learned in a classroom into their daily work lives. After all, learning and training lead to better performance when properly aligned with work activity.

The business problem

Accenture's Continuous Learning Model



While I was scratching my head and searching for the right answer, I stumbled across a news article about a colleague, Marissa Gilbert, who had used blog posts to send out a "pay-it-forward"- type of 30 day challenge every day for a month. I immediately saw the applicability to the business problem I needed to solve. And our participants rated this experience highly, as a fun, experiential way to learn and to collaborate with others. I knew that providing a phenomenal learning experience for Accenture people is one of the key drivers behind our learning innovations.

And thus the 30 Day Challenge: "Developing People Is our Business" was born.

The inspiration for the 30 Day Challenge



The 30 Day Challenge consists of thirty micro-actions. Micro-actions are activities that can be integrated into the daily work, things that take less than ten minutes to accomplish. Usually, the actions we request of our people take time in preparation and implementation. I wanted these micro-actions to stand in contrast to that typical approach. Given that I wanted people to take the actions every day, they needed to be manageable. Not only that, I wanted to show that it's the "little" things that make all the difference. They add up over time, contributing to people's engagement bit by bit.

Here are a couple of examples. Notice just how "micro" – and common sensical -- they are:

- Write a note/letter to someone today. Perhaps a thank-you note

or a note that simply says you're thinking about the person.

- Pay yourself an act of kindness, to congratulate yourself on a job well done this week, no matter how great or small.

So the micro-actions were sent out one at a time, over a month. Participants in the challenge would, ideally, take the challenge each day. You can read all the challenges in Part II.

Before the campaign officially began, people signed up to receive the challenges in their inbox, from my blog. Ideally, I wanted people to comment, within the blog, on the actions they had taken and the impact they noticed on themselves, the people around them, and the business. Those who did comment

seemed to learn more about their beliefs and actions by this simple act of reflection. I also summarized the comments the next day, to draw out the themes in the learning, for the benefit of those who had not read the comments.

This was social media on its best day, encouraging on-the-job learning, reflection and behaviour change. A kind of action learning, if you like.

The challenge also enabled us to connect people to job aids and other performance support tools, which they might otherwise not have had access to. Our guiding principle was that everything must be readable and actionable in less than ten minutes, to be sure that people would take action that day.

What is the 30 Day Challenge?



3500 people signed up, to receive the challenges each day. That so many people voluntarily signed up tells us how much our people value people development, and how seriously they take the responsibility.

Because we used social media to distribute the challenges, we were able to reach a global audience. In fact, we had participants from forty-seven different countries.

They were from all levels of the organization, and across all our workforces. Another Accenture belief is that you can be a leader at any level, and from any seat. This was a great way to encourage our pipeline of leaders to embrace the Developing People Is our Business belief, and to start applying that philosophy early in their careers, so they can make a habit of it.

A few teams took the challenge together to provide encouragement and learn from each other through conversation.

Who signed up?



Immediately after the challenge, we asked each participant how many other people they felt they had impacted as a result of the challenges. According to the self-reports, each participant had an impact on an average of seven people as a result of the challenge. If we extrapolate that out to the 3500 people who took part, we had a positive impact on 24,500 people.

Thirty days after the challenge finished, we sent a survey to participants, asking which challenges they completed and the business impacts they observed. One hundred and sixty-one people responded. We found that the typical respondent engaged in thirteen challenges during the month.

And the impact?

Over 60% of respondents completed the following challenges:

- Ask two people how their days are going or how their days went, and really listen to them
- Think about someone who inspires you and to tell that person why he/she does
- Remember to make eye contact and listen with genuine interest
- Write a note/letter to someone. Perhaps a thank-you note or a note that simply says you're thinking about the person
- Sit down and take the time to have a conversation with someone, without rushing on to the next task or meeting.

We draw two conclusions from this:

1. It seems that those challenges which were already likely to be part of their working day, which simply needed a tweak in the way they did them, were more likely to be undertaken
2. Those which are about recognizing others were more likely to be undertaken, especially as we gave them a link to a neat e-postcard tool for the thank you note challenge, which many of them had not previously seen

(the usage of this site increased by 300% on the days surrounding this challenge).

In addition to the recognition challenges, we also saw that challenges to do with networking were popular.

In the thirty days after the challenge month, people reported that they were still taking actions as a result of the challenge, more so than they did before the challenge (though not to the same degree as during the challenge month). However, people were more likely to be engaging in behaviours that increased the quality of their communication, or coached and developed others.

People observed moderate business impacts in a number of additional areas, with the largest being their own level of engagement, and increased opportunities to collaborate with others.

In summary, we must ensure there is value in what we spend on learning. At Accenture, we continue to look for ways to deliver that learning as cost-effectively as possible. This was one way of creating value for our business, at an ultra low-cost per person. The entire project cost around \$1 of time to set up and run for each person participant.

A man with dark skin and short, curly hair is running towards the camera. He is wearing a bright yellow long-sleeved shirt and blue athletic shorts. The background is a bright, overexposed outdoor setting, possibly a park or a beach, with some blurred structures in the distance.

What would we change?

A couple of people told us that once they had missed a few challenges, they became disheartened and then didn't take any at all from that point on – and then felt guilty for it. This parallels a typical workplace process, so this in itself is good learning for people about their own motivation.

I learned that we should encourage participants not to worry if they miss a day or two or ten, but instead to pick up where they left off and keep going. Any action is better than no action.

Setting up your own 30 Day Challenge:

Success Factors

- Be very clear about the business outcome you hope to achieve
- Identify your target audience
- Identify your criteria for choosing challenges. At the very least, choose challenges that are short (less than 5 minutes) to put into practice, and relevant to your performance outcomes. If you work in a virtual environment, make sure the challenges are possible in that context
- While challenges may look like common sense at first glance, the ones that provide a "twist" seem to be received the best, e.g., "Ask someone how their day is going, and really listen to their reply"
- Tell people how to sign up to receive the blog/micro-blog each day via alerts, as they are unlikely to go into the post without the reminder. Advertise verbally and in writing for the month before the 30 days start, sending out teasers

at minus 30 days, minus 10 days, minus 5 days, minus 1 day

- Keep the challenges secret, to create a buzz of anticipation ahead of the 30 days
- Post the challenges every day, at a consistent time
- For best results, the blogger should summarize the themes coming out of the comments, so participants see the connection to the new belief you want them to have.

Development and Delivery Considerations

- Choose the business-relevant challenges carefully, such that they meet your criteria
- Think ahead about how you want to evaluate success. For example:
 - number people signed up to receive alerts,
 - demographics of people signed up,
 - comments related to each challenge,

- demographics of commenters, asking participants about the impact on the business.

Challenge month minus 30 days: Advertising the challenge

- Write a succinct invitation about the purpose of the challenge, and sign-up instructions to receive an alert every day
- Identify relevant meetings where you can let your target audience (or those who communicate to them) know about the challenge. Talk to as many people as you can, and follow up with the invitation
- Include HR in your communications, as they will be in a position to pass on to those they support
- Encourage people in the invitation to send it on to at least three other people in their network, to create viral spread
- Continue to encourage sign-up during the 30 days, as it doesn't matter if people join late.

Setting up your own 30 Day Challenge:

Challenge Month: Sending the challenges

- Send out challenge at consistent time each day (otherwise people contact you via e-mail wondering if it's got lost)
- Encourage all communications to happen through comments for everyone to read, rather than directly to your inbox
- Encourage reflection on the actions taken through comments. Ask participants specifically "what was the impact on you, others and the organization?" or "what are you learning?"
- Summarize the comments, especially the learning and the impact, the next day
- Choose challenges for the weekend that can be conducted with family and friends; send Friday, Saturday and Sunday challenges on the Friday
- Given that your aim is to change habits for the long-term, encourage participants to come up with their own challenges on the last day, and to share those with others through the comments
- Bear in mind that if your participants are from multiple geographies, they may not all receive the challenge on the correct day, due to time zone differences. In order to be inclusive, I recommend that you recognize this is an early post.


Challenge month plus 30 days: keeping the learning going

- Send the full list of the 30 challenges in one handout, along with any other resources that would be useful to your audience to continue to meet the business need
- Immediate survey: Ask participants to comment on the impact of the challenge: for example, which challenges did they take, how many people did they impact as a result of the challenge, and how would they summarize the impact on themselves, others and the business performance. The very act of asking them which challenges they took reminds them again of the actions they can continue to take
- You could also encourage participants to create a pod/ vod-cast about what they learned
- Summarize the learning and the impact to the business, and communicate both to those who took part and to your other stakeholders
- Include a news article about the success of the challenge, in your company's newsletter, if this is a global challenge, or in a local communication as appropriate
- + 30 day survey. Ask participants which challenges they have continued to put into practice. Again, this serves as a reminder to them to take the micro-actions.

This section gives you the 30 challenges, one for each day of a month. Take the challenges and see what a difference it makes to yourself, the people around you and your business performance.

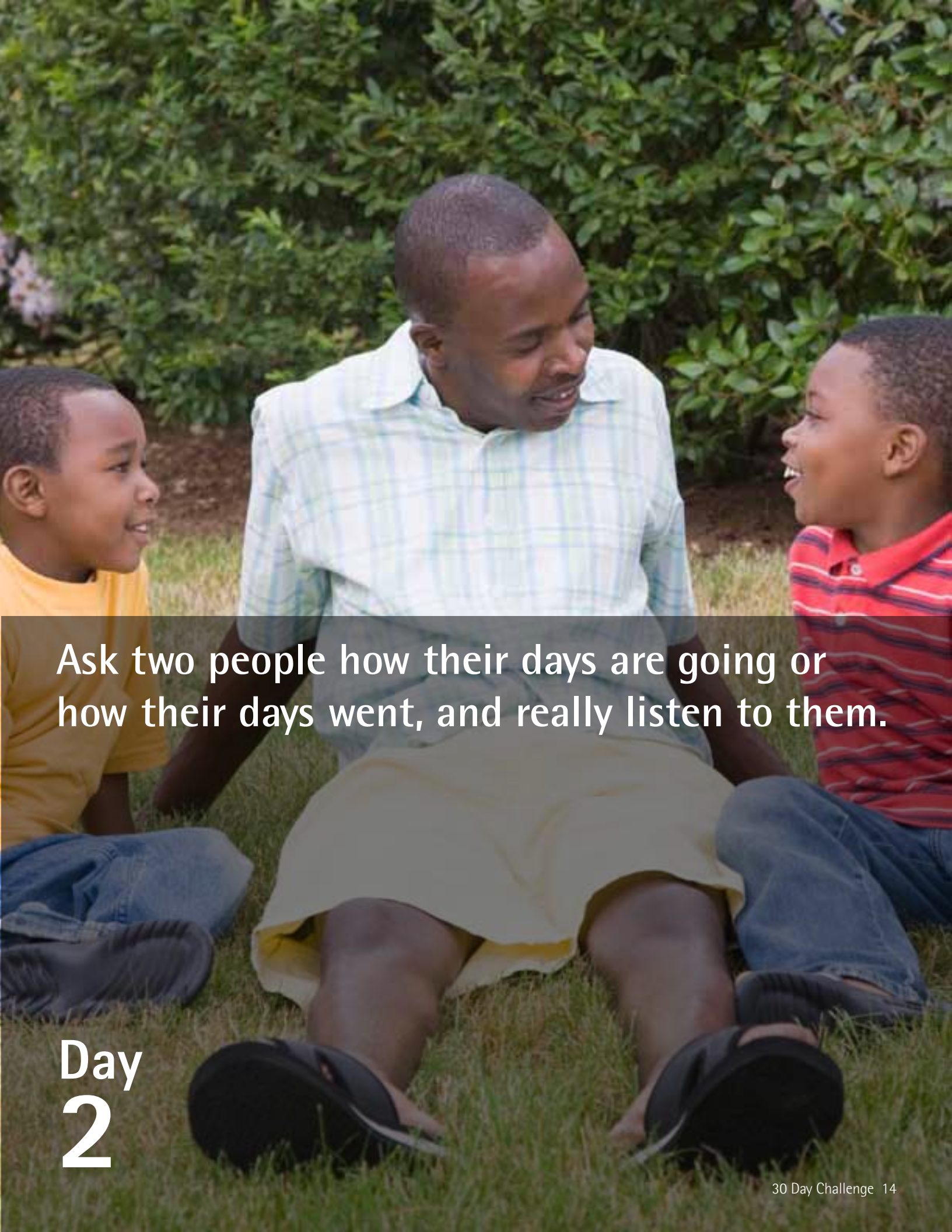
Part II: The 30 Challenges



A photograph of a man and a young boy standing on a digital scale in a bathroom. The man, on the left, is wearing a white t-shirt and blue and white striped pajama pants. The boy, on the right, is shirtless and wearing the same striped pajama pants. Both are looking upwards with expressions of awe or inspiration. The background shows a bathroom with a window, a sink, and a mirror.


Think about someone who inspires you and tell that person today what it is in them that inspires you.

Day
1

A photograph of a man and two young boys sitting on a grassy lawn. The man, in the center, is wearing a light blue and white plaid polo shirt and a light-colored skirt. He is looking down and to his right, smiling. To his left, a young boy in a yellow t-shirt is looking up at him. To his right, another young boy in a red and black striped polo shirt is looking at him and smiling. The background is a dense green hedge. A semi-transparent dark grey box with white text is overlaid on the middle of the image.


Ask two people how their days are going or how their days went, and really listen to them.

Day
2

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a person with grey hair, seen from the side, writing on a piece of paper with a green pen. They are holding a small, square photograph of a group of people in their other hand. The background is out of focus, showing what appears to be a desk or table with other papers.

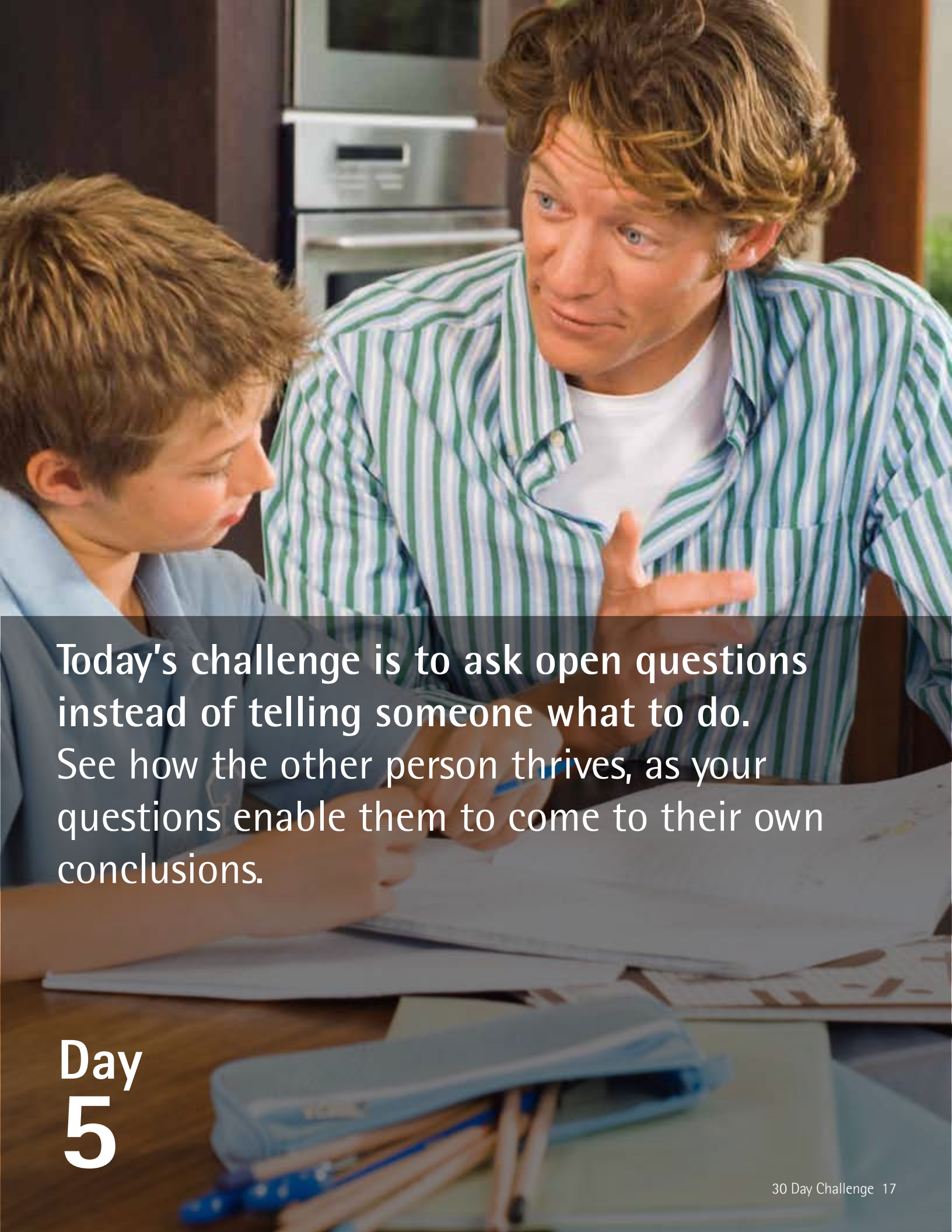
Write a note/letter to someone today.
Perhaps a thank-you note or a note that simply
says you're thinking about the person.

Day
3



Think about a valuable piece of advice that you have been given or that you have learned over the years. Your challenge is to **pass that advice along to another person today.**

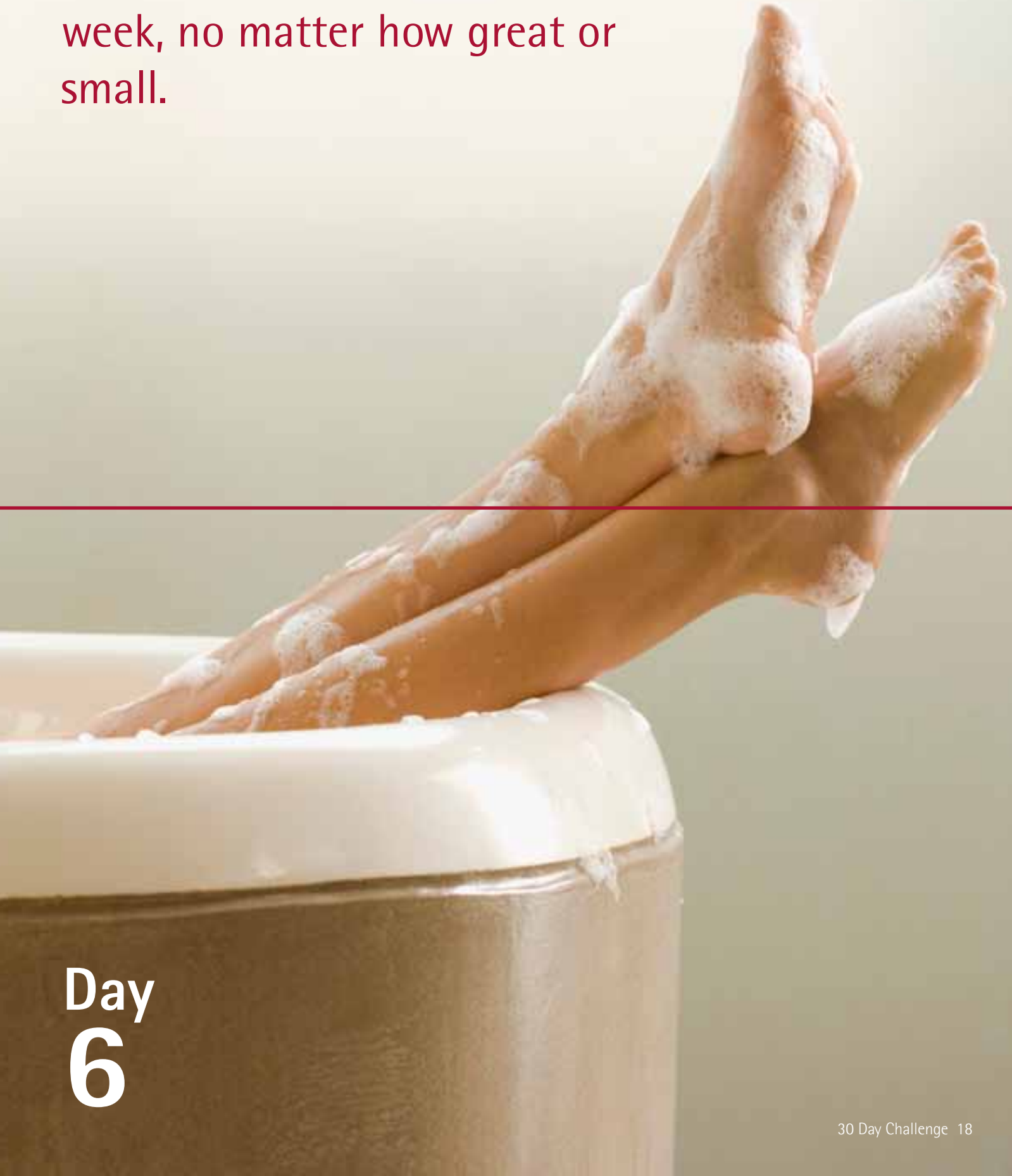
Day
4

A man with curly brown hair, wearing a green and white striped shirt over a white t-shirt, is leaning over a wooden table. He is looking at a young boy with short brown hair, who is wearing a light blue shirt. The boy is looking down at a stack of papers on the table. The man is gesturing with his right hand, pointing towards the papers. In the background, there is a kitchen with a stainless steel oven and a microwave. The scene is lit with warm, indoor lighting.

Today's challenge is to ask open questions instead of telling someone what to do. See how the other person thrives, as your questions enable them to come to their own conclusions.

Day
5

Pay yourself an act of kindness,
to congratulate yourself on a job well done this
week, no matter how great or
small.




Day
6



Remember to make eye contact and listen with genuine interest today. You are certain to create a favorable impression if you are fully present in the conversation.

Day
7

A photograph of a male coach in a light blue shirt and dark vest, smiling and raising his fist in celebration. He is surrounded by several young baseball players in white and blue uniforms, who are also raising their fists and wearing baseball caps. They are standing in front of a chain-link fence. The scene is outdoors, likely at a baseball field.

Start a team meeting/conference call today
with a positive recount of what's going right.

Day
8

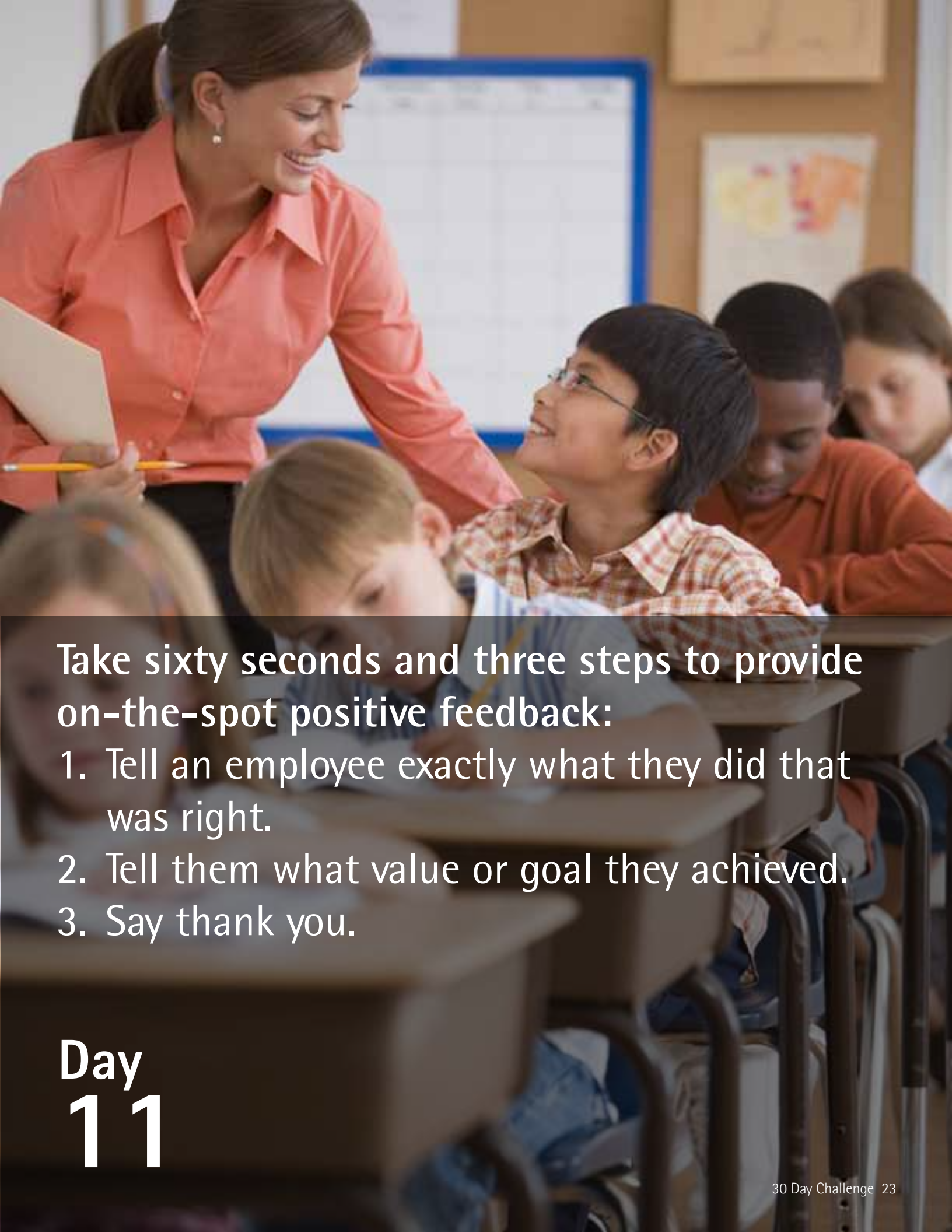
Sit down and take the time to have a conversation with someone today, without rushing on to the next task or meeting.

Day
9

A man and a young boy are on a beach. The man is sitting on a red inflatable couch, and the boy is sitting on his shoulders. Both have their arms raised in the air, smiling. The background shows the ocean with waves and a clear blue sky.

Take a colleague to a meeting today, where they can stretch themselves.


Day
10



Take sixty seconds and three steps to provide on-the-spot positive feedback:

1. Tell an employee exactly what they did that was right.
2. Tell them what value or goal they achieved.
3. Say thank you.

Day
11

A young girl with dark hair in two braids is sitting in a green rope hammock. She is wearing a light pink tank top and a purple skirt. She is smiling and looking down at something in her hands. The background is a soft-focus green lawn and trees.

At the end of the day, write down three things that went right this week. Getting in the habit of looking for the positives around you will pay dividends and give you many things to recognize.

Day
12



Do something that scares you today
(stretch yourself!)

Day
13



Reach out to someone today and ask how you might help them.

Day
14

A warm, indoor scene in a clothing store. A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a white tank top, is smiling and looking down at a bright pink dress she is holding. A young girl with dark brown hair, wearing a light blue lace-trimmed dress, is also smiling and looking at the dress. They are standing in front of racks of colorful clothing, including yellow and orange items. In the foreground, there are two shopping bags, one pink and one dark blue. The overall atmosphere is joyful and collaborative.

Today, ask for people's opinion and input on a project. Trusting their judgment and then acting on it is one of the greatest compliments you can give a person.

Day
15



True trust-building leaders communicate often and well so that people feel "in on things."
What do you need to over-communicate about today?

Day
16

Gossip needs to be shared most with the person about whom you are gossiping. **Solve problems through direct communication with the person/people involved.**



Day
17



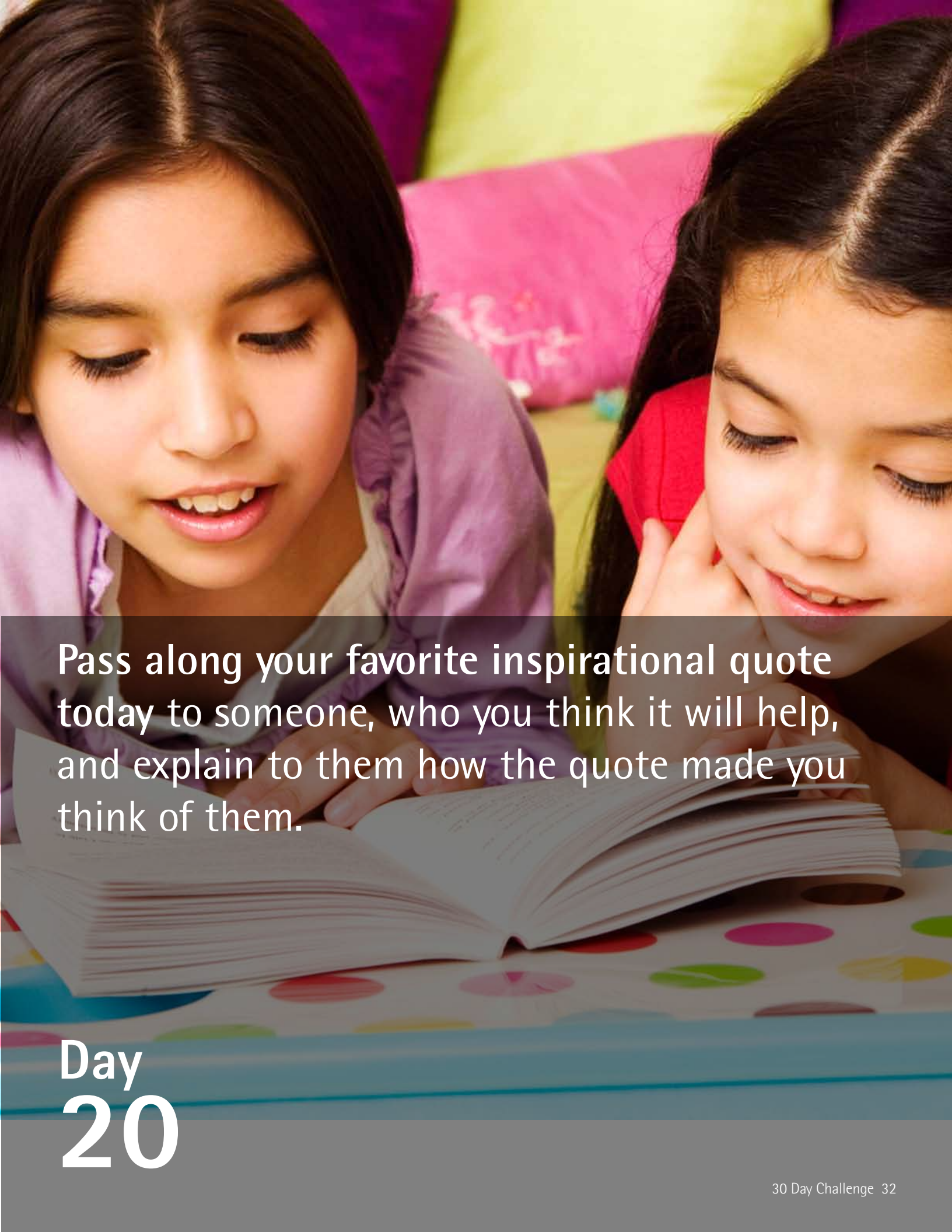
Catch someone doing something right today,
and praise them for it immediately.

Day
18



Complete one piece of people developer documentation today that you have been putting off. This could be a performance review, a mid-year review, or a simple email delivering feedback to someone's supervisor.

Day
19


A close-up photograph of two young girls with dark hair, wearing purple and red shirts, lying on a colorful polka-dot surface and reading an open book together. The girl on the left is smiling and looking down at the book, while the girl on the right is also smiling and looking at the book. The background shows colorful pillows in shades of pink, yellow, and purple.

Pass along your favorite inspirational quote today to someone, who you think it will help, and explain to them how the quote made you think of them.

Day
20

Today, pick up the phone or e-mail to schedule a time to catch up with someone that you have mentored in the past and see how they are doing.

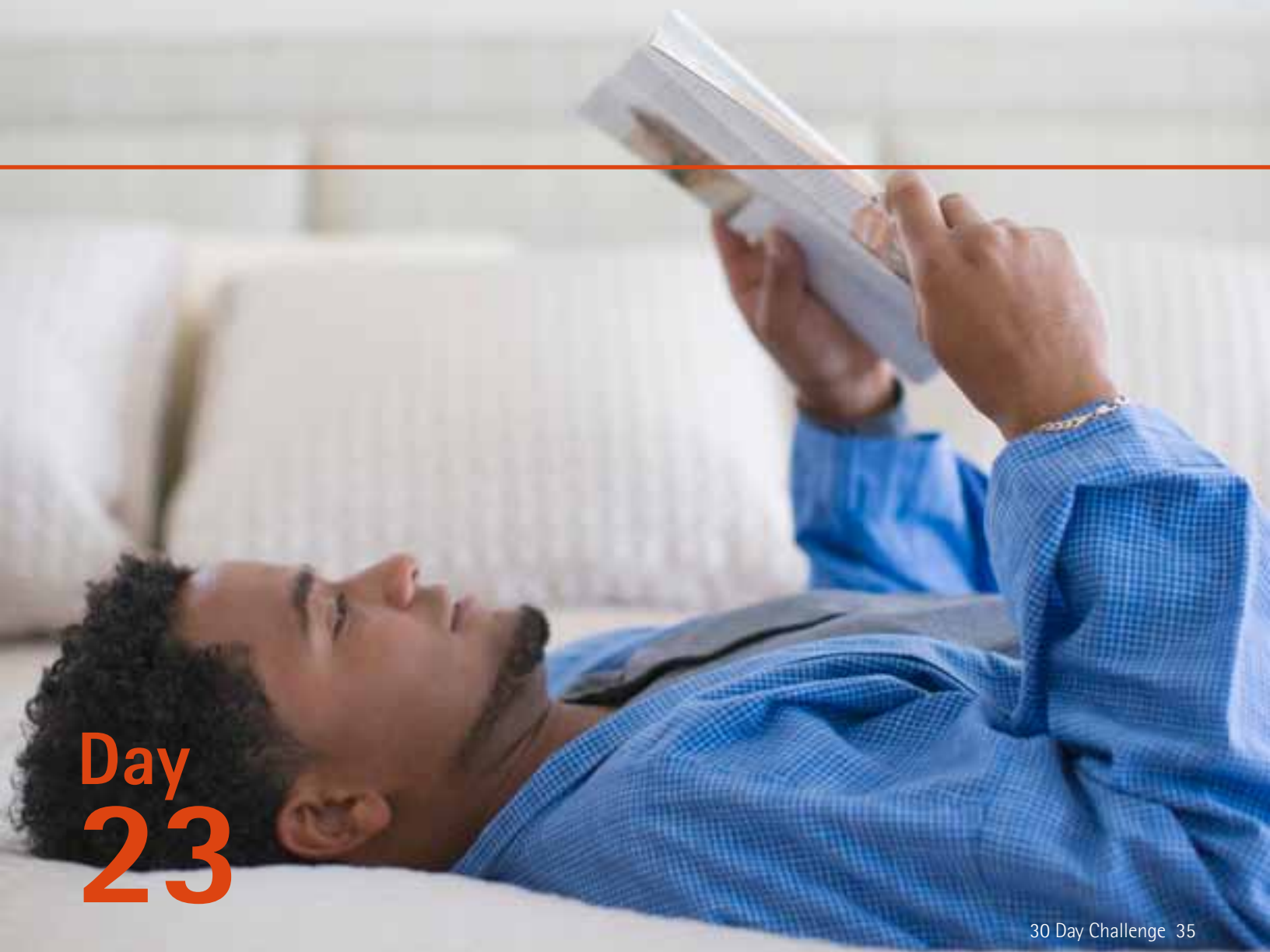
Day
21

A woman and a young girl are shown from the chest up, looking upwards and to the left. The woman, on the right, has her arm around the girl's shoulder. The girl, on the left, is pointing her right index finger towards the upper left corner of the frame. They are both smiling and appear to be in a room with a large window in the background. The window has white frames and multiple panes. The lighting is bright and natural, suggesting daytime.


Give people the gift of your time by “single tasking” today—commit in at least one meeting that you will give the meeting/call participants your full undivided attention—no multi-tasking with email, instant messenger, etc. Both you and your colleagues will benefit!

Day
22

Read one article on some aspect of leadership that you would like to improve on. Share with others what you learn and the actions you are going to take as a result.

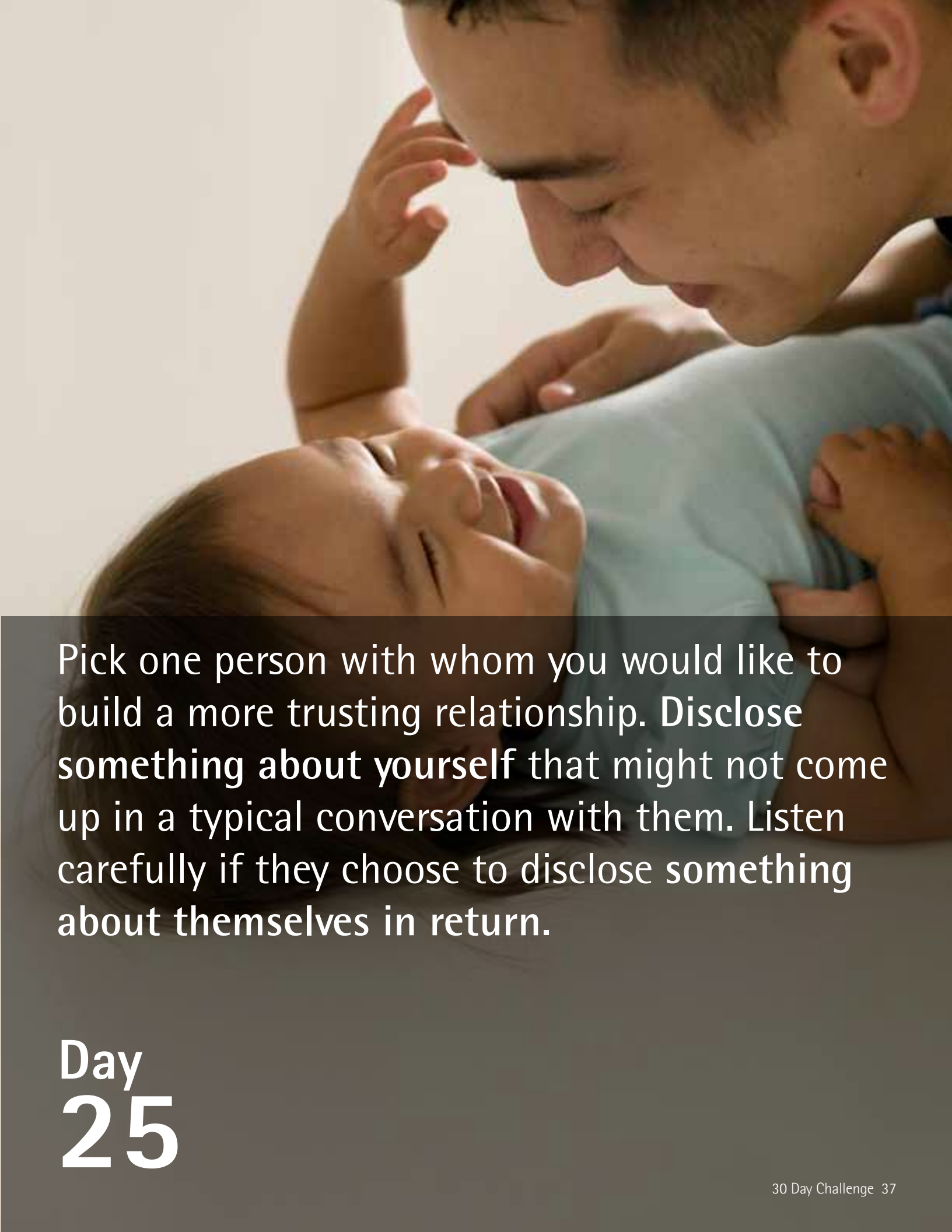


Day
23

A photograph of a man with dark hair and a light blue shirt sitting at a desk, looking at a laptop. Two children, a boy in a light green shirt and a girl in a light blue shirt, are leaning over his shoulder, looking at the screen. The scene is indoors, with a window in the background showing some greenery.

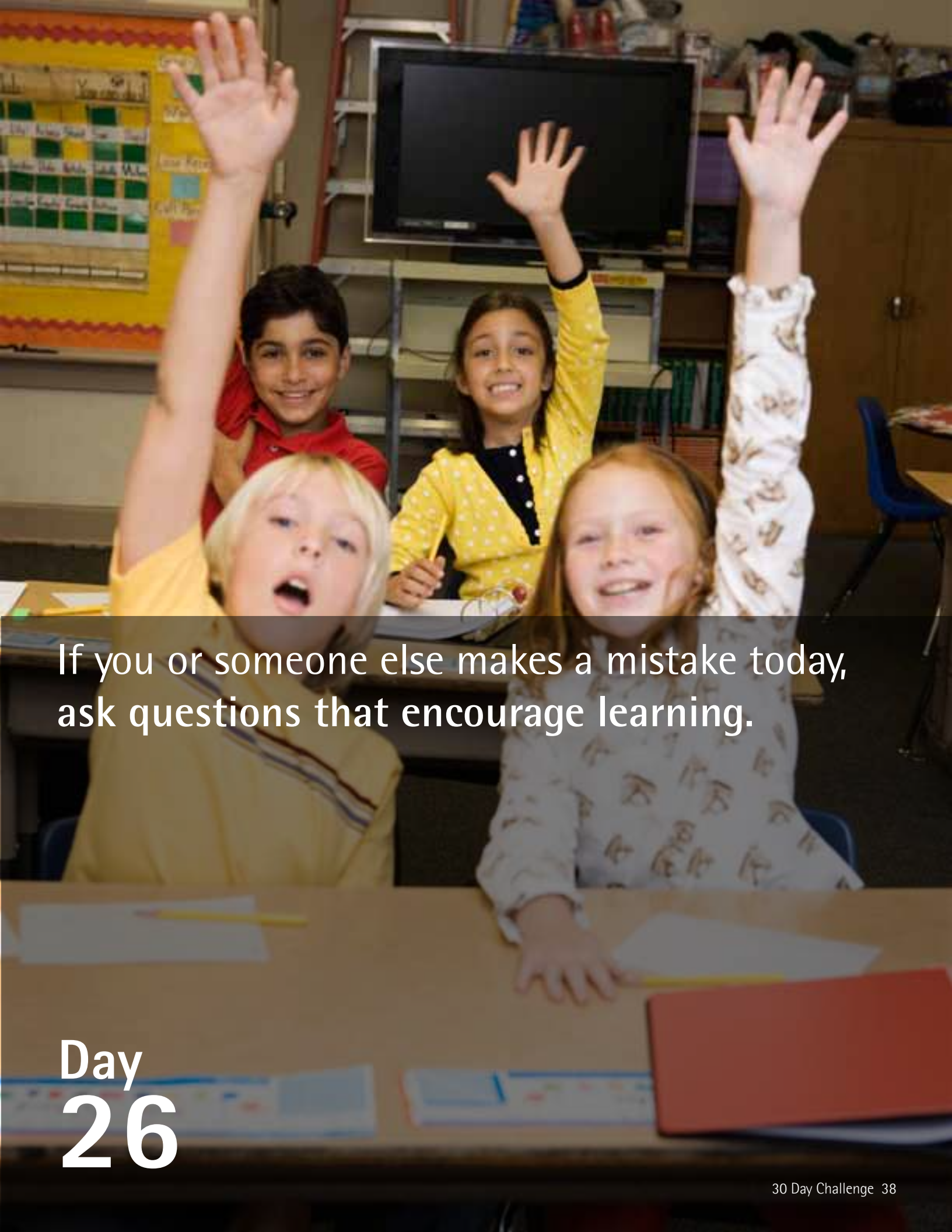
When we think of developing people, we often look "down" more than we look "up". **Provide one piece of constructive feedback to your boss today,** that will enable you to do an even better job.

Day
24

A close-up photograph of a man and a young girl lying down, looking at each other and smiling. The man is on the right, leaning over the girl on the left. They are both looking at each other with affection. The girl is wearing a light blue shirt. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.


Pick one person with whom you would like to build a more trusting relationship. **Disclose something about yourself** that might not come up in a typical conversation with them. Listen carefully if they choose to disclose something about themselves in return.

Day
25

A photograph of four children in a classroom setting. In the foreground, a boy with blonde hair and a girl with red hair are both raising their right hands. Behind them, a boy with dark hair and a girl with dark hair are also raising their hands. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows a classroom with a television on a stand, a bulletin board with a calendar, and various classroom supplies.


If you or someone else makes a mistake today,
ask questions that encourage learning.

Day
26

A photograph of four people standing in a doorway. On the left, a man in a yellow shirt and jeans is gesturing with his hands towards a man in a teal shirt and khaki pants. The man in teal is smiling and gesturing back. To the right, a woman in an orange shirt and dark pants is smiling and talking to another woman in a light-colored shirt and jeans. They are all in a doorway with a staircase visible in the background.

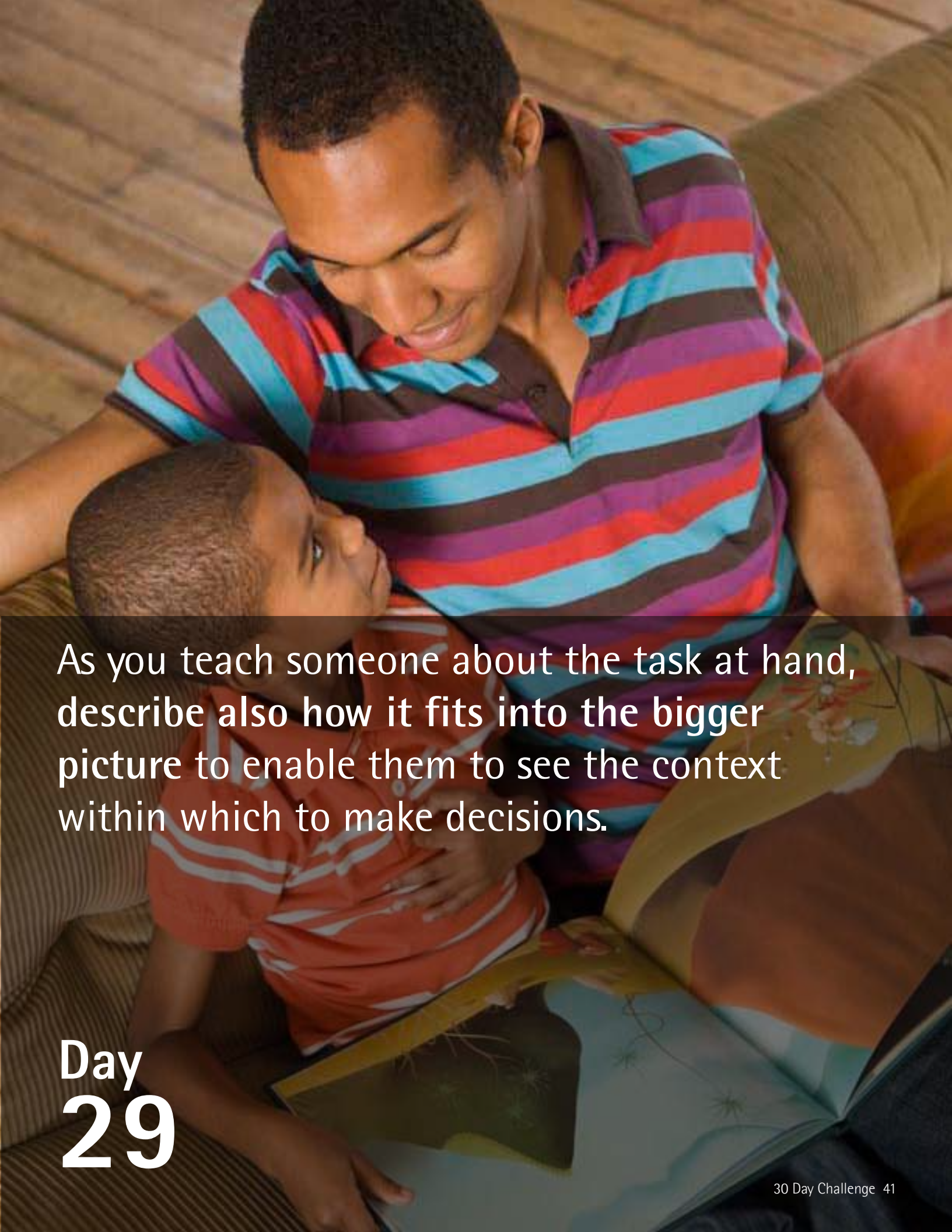
Ask someone to introduce you to someone new
to expand your network today.

Day
27

A man and a woman are celebrating on a golf course. The man, on the left, is wearing a dark blue polo shirt and khaki pants, with his arms raised in the air. The woman, on the right, is wearing a yellow sleeveless shirt, white pants, and a white visor, also with her arms raised. She is holding a golf club. They are standing on a green lawn with a dense line of trees in the background.

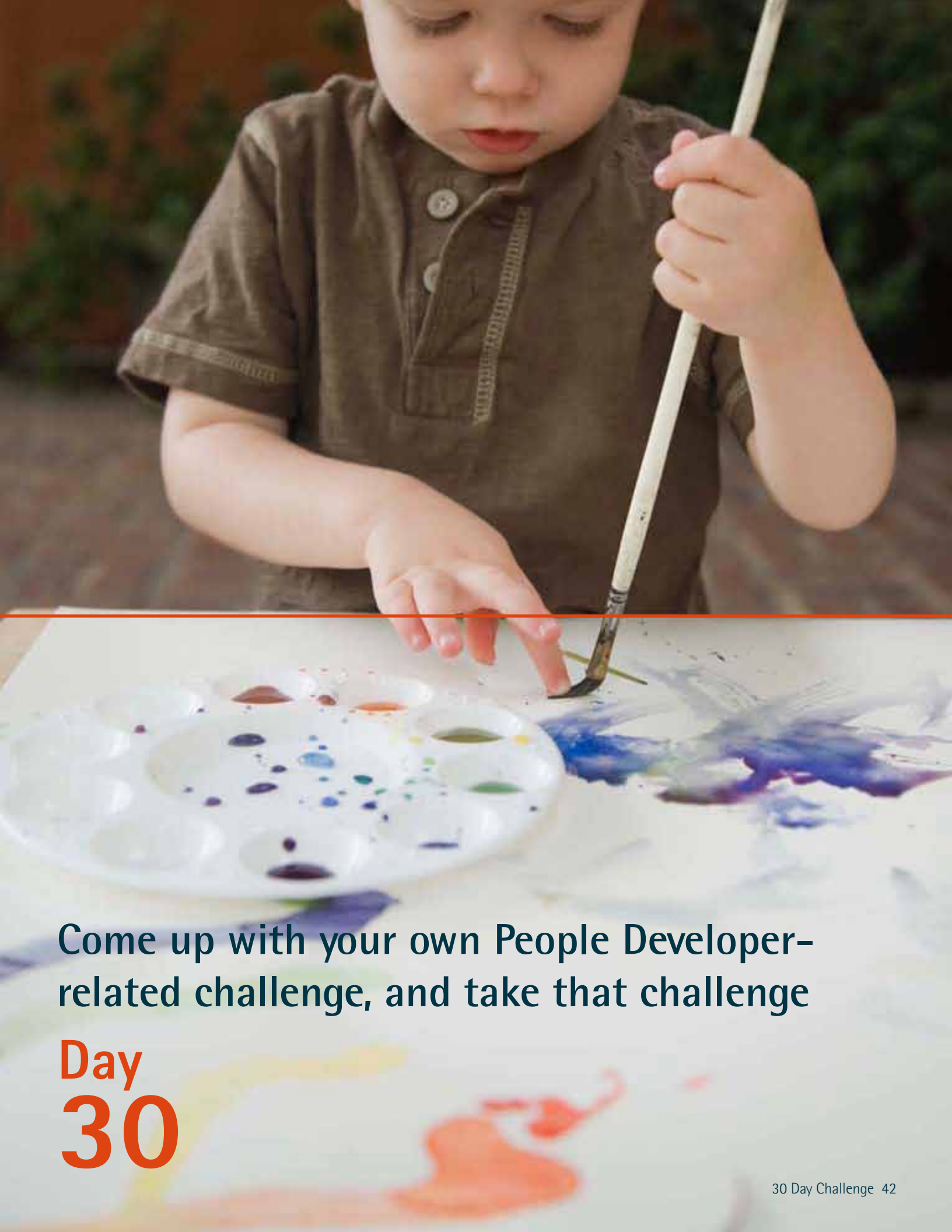
Pay a compliment to at least three people today!

Day
28

A photograph of a man and a young boy sitting on a couch, reading a large book together. The man, wearing a colorful striped polo shirt, is looking down at the book with a smile. The boy, wearing a red and white striped shirt, is looking up at the man. The book they are reading has large, colorful illustrations of a landscape with mountains and a body of water. The background shows a wooden floor and a brown couch.


As you teach someone about the task at hand, describe also how it fits into the bigger picture to enable them to see the context within which to make decisions.

Day
29



Come up with your own People Developer-related challenge, and take that challenge

Day
30



Last, but not least, if you still want inspiration,
watch this digital story of the 30 Day Challenge:
[The Lone Sunbeam \(05:03\)](#)

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* Socratic Dialogues written and directed by [Fred Friendly Seminars, Inc.](#) for and with Accenture