

Swanvesha

MAY 2025

◇	<u>TALLY HO</u> Welcome notes	PG. 2
◇	<u>MUSINGS</u> Cosmos to conference room	PG. 3
◇	<u>NOVELLA</u> Just doin my job	PG. 4
◇	<u>CORPORATE CULTURE</u> Balancing Work-Life	PG. 5
◇	<u>HASTA LUEGO</u> Laugh a bit – It's good for everything	PG. 6

“We know what we are. But know not what we may be”

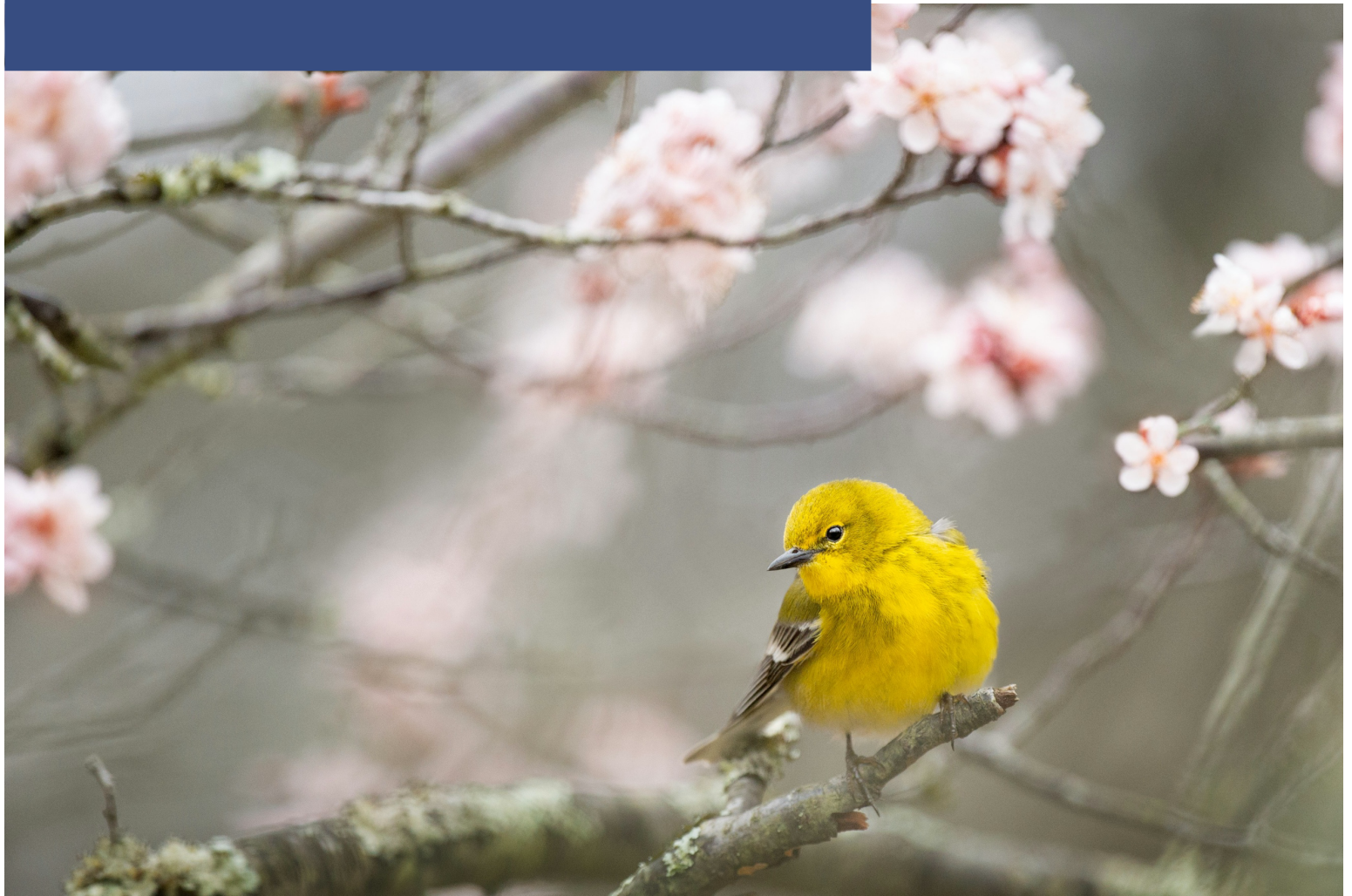
– Ophelia, (*Hamlet*, Act IV, Scene 5)



WELCOME TO SWANVESHA

Swanvesha (Swa-Anvesha, Sanskrit for *Self-Inquiry*) offers insights, stories, and actionable strategies to help leaders grow and adapt in an ever-changing world. Stay informed, stay inspired, and lead with purpose.

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WELCOME NOTES

May is a month of possibilities—it may snow, it may be hot, it may be beautiful, or it may surprise us with all of the above in a single day. As the days grow brighter and the flowers burst into bloom, let's immerse ourselves in this beauty – for a moment of peace and serenity.

This month in ***Musings***, we explore the extraordinary journey of astronauts returning to Earth after long stays in space, and how their relearning process offers profound lessons for leaders. In ***Novella***, I share a humorous tale about “doing your job perfectly” and the unexpected misalignments it can create. Finally, in ***Corporate Culture***, I reflect on the evolving concept of work-life balance and how it changes over time.

And finally, I'd love to hear from you! If you have thoughts, feedback, or a topic you'd like me to cover in future issues, feel free to reach out at swanvesha@gmail.com I am an Executive and Leadership Coach Connect with me on my website www.swanvesha.com for more resources.

Happy reading.

Musings



COSMOS TO CONFERENCE ROOM



Our brain's ability to learn and retain knowledge over time is one of the most fascinating traits of our species. It's this very ability that shapes our habits and programs many actions into our subconscious. Think about riding a bicycle—you might not have touched one in years, yet you can still hop on and ride as if no time had passed. It just happens.

But what if, one day, you suddenly couldn't walk in a straight line or even stand upright? You'd need to *relearn* everything.

This isn't a far-fetched scenario. When astronauts return to Earth after extended missions in space, they often face exactly this. Recently, when astronauts Nick Hague, Aleksander Gorbunov, Sunita Williams, and Butch Wilmore returned after spending 286 days in space, the headlines focused on the duration of their stay. But what's truly fascinating is what their bodies went through during that time. Prolonged time in space causes significant changes in the human body—alterations in gene expression, shifts in gut microbiome composition, muscle and bone loss, vision issues, decreased immunity, increased inflammation, a higher risk of blood clots, and even DNA damage. Thankfully, most of these effects begin to reverse within six months of returning to Earth with some help from healthcare experts who support their relearning. This got me thinking: Do leaders, too, need to relearn over time? The obvious answer is yes—but what exactly do they forget? I spoke to a few leaders and found recurring themes. The most common?

- **Complacency** – Many leaders admitted to becoming so familiar with their roles that it felt like they could do the job blindfolded. This autopilot mode, while efficient in the short term, often dulls their edge. It quietly creeps in when success becomes routine, leaders begin to rely on experience rather than questioning whether those patterns still serve them or their teams.
- **Vision Alignment** – Leaders can forget to regularly revisit and realign themselves—and their teams—with the broader mission. Over time, vision can drift; assumptions build up, and what once felt clear becomes fragmented or blurred.
- **Self-Awareness**– Perhaps the most foundational leadership trait, self-awareness can erode under the constant pressure of decision-making. Leaders may lose touch with how they're showing up, how they're perceived by others, and how their behavior impacts the culture and performance around them.

These topics each deserve deeper exploration. But in a nutshell: just as astronauts must relearn how to function on Earth, perhaps leaders, too, must relearn how to lead—with intention, clarity, and awareness.

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I once heard a story about a man walking down the street who noticed two workers doing something strange. One man was digging a hole, and the other was immediately filling it back in. Then they'd move a few steps ahead and repeat the process. Puzzled, the man approached them and asked what they were doing.

Their answer was astonishing: "There are supposed to be three of us. I dig the holes, the second plants the saplings, and the third fills them back in. The planter's not here today. But we are doing our jobs."

As hilarious as this is, it perfectly illustrates what often happens during large-scale project implementations. In this article, I'll explore three common scenarios where this phenomenon plays out:

1. Upgrading a Customer-Facing Platform – Isn't it obvious that the first step in improving a customer-facing platform should be asking customers what upgrades they'd like to see? After all, it's a platform designed for their use. Yet, most system implementations proceed based on assumptions about customer needs. Sometimes, it's the product owner or senior leadership who decides what they think the customer wants. Referring to the story, the planter is absent.

2. Getting People on a Call – How many people should ideally join a 30-minute call to make it productive? While three is manageable, four or five can still work if there's structure and order. However, in most IT calls, standups, and meetings, everyone is invited. The ones who truly matter often don't show up, and those who do are simply "doing their job." This chaos persists even after someone spends significant time coordinating calendars.

2. Employee Onboarding – In HR, onboarding programs often focus on completing checklists: forms filled, IDs issued, and policies explained. But new employees are rarely guided on how their role fits into the organization's mission or introduced to key collaborators. This creates an environment where they may dig holes and fill them back in, without knowing where the sapling of contribution was supposed to grow.

Projects should focus not just on the process but on the purpose. Everyone involved needs to understand the overarching goal and their role in achieving it. It's not enough to merely do your job; you need to know *why* you're doing it. And more importantly, speak up when the sapling isn't being planted.

Corporate Culture



BALANCING WORK-LIFE



Work-life balance is a topic that's been discussed endlessly, with countless opinions and advice. Yet the fundamental question remains: What does an ideal work-life balance look like?

The simple answer is: **It's deeply personal.** It's not a one-size-fits-all concept but a dynamic, evolving process shaped by life stages, values, and circumstances.

Early Career: Freedom Meets Work

At the start of your career, balance often revolves around socializing, hobbies, and enjoying financial independence. Long hours at work don't feel burdensome because responsibilities outside of work are minimal. For many, this phase is about building a professional foundation while still carving out time for fun.

Mid-Career: Shifting Priorities

As relationships deepen, families grow, and responsibilities increase, the equation changes. Work-life balance now involves managing energy and focus across competing priorities. While professional success remains important, personal fulfillment takes on greater significance. Adapting to this stage often means embracing strategies like flexible work arrangements, delegation, and setting boundaries to ensure both work and home life receive attention.

Later Career: Purpose and Legacy

In later stages, balance evolves again. With personal responsibilities less pressing and career goals largely met, many focus on purpose and legacy. This might mean scaling back work, diving into passion projects, or mentoring the next generation. Balance here is about aligning actions with values and aspirations.

A Dynamic Process, Not a Destination

Work-life balance isn't static—it shifts as life unfolds. The key is self-awareness: regularly evaluating your priorities and adjusting your approach to align with what matters most. Rather than striving for perfection, embrace balance as a fluid, flexible process. Some weeks work may dominate; other times, personal pursuits take precedence. What's important is staying aligned with your values and goals.

Ultimately, work-life balance isn't about equal parts but about living in alignment with what matters most.

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Hasta Luego (See you later)



THANK YOU

Thank you very much for reading my newsletter. I hope you enjoyed it. As we wind down, here is something lighthearted.

An office worker had read my article on work-life balance and wanted to share his newfound insight with his wife, a nutritionist. Looking skeptically at his plate of greens, the man quipped, “Honey, I read an article about work-life balance and how it evolves over time. So today, for every unit of productive work I did, I made sure to do an equal amount of unnecessary work. That way, I’ve achieved perfect balance!”

That night, as he settled onto the couch with a blanket, he reflected that his newfound sense of “balance” had certainly been rewarded—in its own way.

Enjoy the weather and stay safe.

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