



## turning managers into leaders

### Merge's Monthly Mega Minute – June 2011

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### How clay becomes porcelain

Last summer, I had the opportunity to explore China, and one of my stops was the National Museum in Beijing. While there, I marveled at the porcelain collections from the T'ang and Yuan dynasties – strikingly attractive pottery that was beautiful and sturdy, yet practical and delicate at the same time. Turns out that this amazing porcelain pottery actually started life as your basic clay pot. Porcelain is just clay and rock – kaolin, or china clay, mixed with pegmatite, a coarse type of granite – and water. But what I saw in China certainly didn't look like clay and was definitely not as frail and brittle as baked mud. So how does a simple clay pot go from plain and fragile to porcelain that's tough and strong, you ask? The answer: heat – incredibly high heat – approximately 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit or 1,200 degrees Celsius that turns the brittle clay into a strong mixture of glass and mullite.

As I learned about the process of creating porcelain from clay that day, I couldn't help but draw a parallel to growth in leadership. Just like the white-hot heat of the kiln converts basic clay into strong porcelain, it's the tough situations and the difficult experiences that crop up in the day-to-day workplace that grow average leaders into exceptional leaders. Whether it's an overflowing schedule or a myriad of deadlines; a thorny discussion about poor performance or a difficult conversation about body odour; a shortage of staff or an excess of complaints; it's the "heat" that toughens and strengthens you and takes you from average to exceptional.

Worth remembering the next time you're facing a tough day at work!