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Building Chief Executive Skills - Leadership versus Management

Article by Andy Low

Many CEO's spend far too much time managing their business day to day and not enough time doing the leadership stuff. This is generally because day to day management is what they did in their functional roles before they became CEO and it is well inside their comfort zone.

Leadership is scary and is often way outside the same zone! It therefore needs work and effort to be successful as a leader.

The role of a leader

Your job is to lead the company and let others do the day to day managing. You therefore need to be clear about what the difference is and ensure that you spend as much time as you can on the activities that only a leader can do.

The primary role of a leader is to inspire, influence and transform the people in your business. Without such people nothing much will happen.

You can do this by creating a model of success that people can aspire to that is often beyond what they think they can achieve. Influence them by spending your personal time with them in a coaching and mentoring role: this is ultimately your responsibility.

There are other things that define leadership:

Creating the Vision

This is yours and yours alone. It is not a collaborative or consensus exercise. Your vision and values will be the way that the direction of the company is set.

Once done, communicate it overwhelmingly. If your staff do not know what the company vision is, you have not told them often enough or clearly enough. This vision should be a BIG goal that is a stretch and an inspiration to your staff. Be clear on where you want to go. Then you can work on how to get there

Be decisive

Great leaders make great and quick decisions so that their staff can act effectively. Be wary of trying to get too much information, this will lead to action paralysis by analysis!

Get enough information make a decision and then adapt if later information causes a change in thinking.

CEO decisions are based on collaboration not consensus. Your role is to gain input from key staff and then decide based on that input. You don't have to get their total agreement, only their agreement to support your decision when you make it. You have the final call on a key decision, after all you are the CEO!

A decisive leader has a better record of keeping and motivating quality staff, often because such staff prefer to work for someone who can make decisions in a timely manner.

Delegate, Delegate, Delegate (see article on The Art of Delegation)

Focus only on CEO and leadership stuff. Most non delegating CEO's do so for various reasons: these include personal preferences, too controlling, lack of quality staff to delegate to, avoidance strategy to doing other more important tasks.

As an exercise, keep a log of all your activity over a weekly period. There will be a staggering amount of activities that are not strategic, not to do with leadership and not focusing on CEO activities.

So, identify those activities you can delegate now and also put together a plan on what you can delegate to others in the future, maybe after a period of development

The business reflects your values- make it happen

Make these values clear to the organisation. You may want to get input from your staff in getting these values agreed. But once set make sure that you set the example in following the values Live them.

In particular:

Notice and praise people who demonstrate these values and ensure that it is highly visible

Therefore, also **draw attention to non performance** of these values and ensure that the necessary corrective action is put in place in a positive way.

Hiring the right people. Learn how to test for people who share your values and how to interview to find out the values they have. The best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour. Never hire people who do not share your values, never mind how good they are.

Action Plan

Keep reviewing the actions you take during the day and where possible delegate the appropriate tasks to others. Sometimes this can be done straightaway, more often a period of development is needed to prepare a key manager to take responsibility.

Continually clear your desk of non strategic activity that prevents you from leadership.

If possible have someone else in the company tasked with telling you when you are getting too involved in the day to day management.

Then you have a chance to become a great leader of a great company that continually delivers great results.