

NO NONSENSE ADVICE

15

FOR FIRST TIME CEOs

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A LUMINARY PUBLICATION



**PUBLISHED BY LUMINARY LEARNING SOLUTIONS
FOR FREE CIRCULATION
FIRST EDITION, 2020**

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PROLOGUE:

So, you are now right at the top : NOW WHAT ?

Ah the view from the Corner Office ! Ah the sweet success ! Ah the name board on the door... The culmination of a career is here : and it's yours...
Congratulations...

Now to work...

Being a CEO is a huge responsibility : and if you don't watch it : a burden. Very few CEOs truly transcend the title and become inspirational leaders who not only achieve superlative results, but also leave behind a legacy of truly grooming others to be the best versions of themselves. Most of the time you either become a true 'asshole' who cares for nothing more than the rupees and cents or a 'really nice guy' who doesn't achieve much :
what a shame !

VERY few ever make it to being a CEO : so, if you are given the mantle : you are either really good, or extremely lucky : ether way : it's yours : to do with it what you please... So, why not make it something worthwhile?

Don't overthink being a CEO. Don't 'take it as it comes either. Planning IS important : but don't be paralyzed by analysis either. Being a CEO is, above all, a whole heap of paradoxes you need to juggle and exercise 'common sense' on : and make decisions which you will have to DIRECTLY face the consequences of...

As with all books in this series : this is NOT an exhaustive 'list' of things to do or not to do : it's merely a distilling of advice : to help you in that all important role.

So... Onwards !

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Chapter 1

Understanding your ROLE

I. What does being a CEO really mean ?

Being a CEO actually means you are now the captain of the ship : and the custodian of the entire crew on it. It is a rather all-encompassing role : and though you DO have a boss as well (in the form of a Board that you report to), for all intentions and purposes - the buck DOES stop with you ! Ultimately, it means that the future of the organisation is now in your hands : and the total responsibility for its success or failure now rests with you.

II. What are the core Objectives a CEO must achieve?

The objectives for a CEO are actually quite far reaching : and all-encompassing. Different organizations will focus on different priorities : however, almost all will have some core objectives set for their commander-in-chief.

In a rather simplistic way : you have a few broad areas of focus :

- Deliver the financial objectives of the organisation
- Grow your team to reach their fullest potential
- Safeguard the reputation of the organisation
 - Be a responsible corporate citizen

The BIGGEST objective : well, that is simple : make sure you leave the organisation in better shape than when you took it on (in every aspect - not only in profitability !)

III. The Management Aspects

CEO is fundamentally a leadership role : however, don't forget that an organization does not 'manage' itself : and the larger the organisation, greater the focus on systems, processes and frameworks to ensure that teams are offered clear direction and focus. Managing is an integral part of being a CEO, especially in ensuring that you place management frameworks around almost all the core areas of the business. Please do remember that 'managing' and 'management processes' should not be misconstrued to mean 'bureaucracy', which is often a major misunderstanding. Whether a process is increasingly complicated or simple is a matter of design and instruction : and you are wise to be able to ensure that simplicity is built into the processes : after all : you ARE the CEO - so you can actually INSIST on it.

IV. The Leadership Aspects

The CORE of your role as a CEO revolves around being a great leader. Almost every aspect of the job : be it driving results or being the spokesperson for the organisation in forums, carries with it an element of leadership.

At the top of the organisation, Leadership revolves around a few key aspects :

- A. Setting a Vision, and a Direction and articulating this across the organisation
- B. Prioritizing what core elements the organisation should focus on : and aligning the overall strategy of the organisation towards this
- C. Building a Leadership pipeline across the organisation
- D. Creating an awesome culture where employees are engaged, motivated and driven
- E. Leading change : and courageously changing those elements within the organization
- F. Leading through uncertainties : and ensuring your team understands the key impact areas to focus on

V. Being the spokesperson for the organisation

Remember that you are the Chief Spokesperson for the organisation : in all forums and to all stakeholders. This does not mean you have to 'be there in person' and be the 'face for the organisation' - far from it. In fact, we recommend you stay 'behind the scenes' and allow others to be the 'face' : but you need to be there to chat the right messages : and ensure that the organisation is seen in the right 'perspective' across all stakeholders. Corporate and Internal Communication are both extremely important. Never underestimate the value of Internal Communication - too many organizations focus too little on being consistent in their internal communication : while branding and corporate communication are generally focused on. Remember : your organisations' reputation is ultimately down to how good the communication strategy is : so, ensure you focus on it from the very beginning.

VI. Being the moral compass of the organisation

You are the Values of the organisation. What you do, and also, equally importantly, what you DON'T do will both drive the culture of the organisation. Be willing to take decisive action against those who violate company values. Remember though : you have to walk the talk. You have to make sure the Senior Team lives the values you espouse as well. Ensuring that you are CLEAR about the type of values you and the team need to live by is critical : or else you would come across as a hypocrite : and this is the worst label to have as the CEO of the company.

Chapter 2

Accepting your RESPONSIBILITIES

I. Your Responsibility to your Shareholders

Some argue that your responsibility towards your shareholders is probably the most important: but we think that there is a fine line between your responsibility toward the shareholders and your team : and one, ideally, should not be at the cost of the other...

However, you are, first and foremost, responsible for the shareholders : and as long as you are within the organisation, you are duty bound and morally bound to be loyal to your shareholders and the organisation they represent. If you disagree with their principles or policies or direction, you need to do everything within your power to convince them : or simply leave. Being the head of the organisation and not being loyal to the rightful owners of the business is a definite 'no' as a CEO.

Loyalty to the shareholders does NOT mean simply being a 'yes' person. NEVER simply agree for the sake of agreeing or because you want to maintain 'peace' : you ARE the CEO - and part of your responsibility is to lock horns when required : and stand firm in your convictions.

Balancing the responsibilities between your team and your shareholders is possibly the biggest balancing act you will perform as a CEO.

II. Your Responsibility towards your Team

Please note that being 'responsible' for your team does not mean that you have to always take their side. When things are tough, you may well have to take drastic decisions : including downsizing. For sure this needs to be the last resort : but it may be inevitable at times. Then, you DO need to take that call : and do your best to ensure the 'pain' caused is minimized : but it IS part of the job. Conversely, it is also part of your job to stand up for them : and their reasonable requests. Profit maximization at the cost of the employees is never a good way to go : remember : you TOO are an employee : as much as the CEO and the custodian of shareholder value.

Being responsible for the team also means growing them, teaching them, reprimanding them when required, punishing them when required and of course, taking that tough call to remove them when required. NEVER allow your 'love' for your team to disable you from taking objective decisions about the team.

III. Your Responsibility towards your Customers

Ultimately if you don't have customers : you don't have a business : it's that simple.

Ensuring customers are delighted : and their interests are safeguarded is of paramount importance. YOU need to be the voice of the customer inside the organisation : and ensure that your processes, systems and policies are all aligned to ensure the customer is at the fore : rather than making it 'easier' for yourselves. 'Hassling' the customer is a sure way to lose business : so, ensure your teams understand and appreciate that all your work within the business needs to ultimately deliver value to the customer.

IV. Your Responsibility towards the wider communities

The organisation is ultimately within a social and community setting. Ensure you are always 'checking the pulse' of the community : and establish ironclad relationships with the key stakeholders within the community. The religious institutions, the police, civil society, players like NGOs and Influencer Groups, governmental institutions, the media - they are all important stakeholders : and you are wise to establish strong links with all of them personally : and encourage key Senior Leaders to establish strong relationships too. This is NOT to hide from responsibility by asking for 'coverups' should something go wrong - but to ensure that the 'narrative' is always controlled so so that unsavory elements do not disrupt your business and its activities. Things WILL go wrong from time to time : own up to it : correct it : but always control the narrative. A business cannot hope to not make mistakes : so, ensure the 'damage control' required when it DOES go wrong is possible through your links and credibility within the community.

A word of caution. NEVER resort to bullshitting the public. Always stand up for the core values of honesty and integrity in facing and owning up to mistakes. At the same time : enable the understanding that you will ALWAYS rectify mistakes : and learn from them : and that you will never exploit the goodwill for unbegotten gains.

Chapter 3

Bring together a Leadership Team

I. The fine line between control and freedom

The freedom to operate as in doing what you think is right is a fundamental principle in ensuring that people will put their heart and soul into their respective roles. Applying too many rules and controls only result in people staying within the 'JD' and not pushing the boundaries and committing to continuous improvement : and it also stops people being proactive.

Giving up control to gain control is quite real. You cannot hope to ever be in control always : you might as well accept it. The organisation can never be fully controlled and run by one person : no matter how competent or brilliant they may be. So, give up control : and build trust instead. Make people under you understand you trust them to 'do what's right by the organisation' and the vast majority of them will respond by taking responsibility and being sincere in their efforts to make sure the organizational objectives are met. A few, however, may well abuse the freedoms given : you need to step in at that point and ensure they are either 'reformed' or 'removed.'

II. Who you need to have in your corner

The most important attribute you need in your core team is a positive attitude and a passion for doing the best for their teammates and their organization. Build this ethos - always - consistently.

Who you need to have 'in your corner' are not people who necessarily 'like' you : but those who share a common Vision as you, share the same values as you, agree on the same principles as you, and of course, are competent in their respective areas. Building a team that merely 'likes' you is a sure way to fail as a CEO.

III. Dealing with power politics and political wrangling

Protecting turf is one of the biggest issues that stalls progress in many an organization. You need to build a team that can see the entire organization as their responsibility and not only their departments.

Remember the sarcastic comment 'operation successful, patient dead' and you will never go wrong !

Fight the impulse to increase departmentalism. It is tough not to for obvious operational ease and control purposes : and to offer some structure and organized ways of doing business: but always drive home the point that it is ultimately ONE TEAM. NEVER allow turf wars to take place : actively discourage them.

IV. Building Team Work amongst bloated egos

No one person should be bigger than the team. As the CEO you must be passionate about this and show this in your daily actions. Make examples of people who are able to grow their subordinates to be better than them and applaud them for it. Egos are inevitable : but never allow egos to get in the way of progress, togetherness and achieving results collectively. Generally, the most ambitious and talented individuals ARE egotistical : and that is ok : provided it is NOT counterproductive to the overall organisation. IF someone DOES become too 'big for their boots' pegging them a notch or two so that they 'come back to planet earth' is part of your job. Be respectful though : and be kind : after all : you are the one who made them part of your team in the first place !

V. Whom to let go : How to let them go

As CEO, you do not need self-centered and negative thinkers in your team.

Sure you try to train, retrain, coach, spend time and ensure that they see things in a more balanced light : but they still remain negative and the center of their own universe, then the organization will do much better without them.

Having to tell a person that he or she is not needed anymore is not easy and is best done In private without compromising the persons dignity. Remember also to tell them WHY they are being let go of : so that they may not make that mistake again : and become better for it. NEVER allow anger or resentment be the reason to 'fire' a person : do it for the right reasons.

VI. Dealing with Difficult subordinates

Many a difficult subordinate may just have a different view on how things should be done. Remember that the most valuable member of your team is often the person who challenges you and is vociferous in putting his point across. Given due respect and recognition, that person will be a great asset. This is a tough challenge : because at times you really don't have the time to explain everything. TAKE the decisions when you need to : after all - that is WHY you are the CEO. However, even afterwards, take the time to explain things : specially if you know for a fact that this 'difficult' person has the organisations' best interests at heart rather than 'just being difficult' ! Often times, when 'difficult' people come around, they become your most trusted generals and advocates : so, invest that time to bring them to the fold.

VII. Keeping a pulse on the 'grassroots'

Knowing your people is a must for any CEO as you are the person responsible for their wellbeing and their families. The truly good CEO works for his subordinates. So spend time with your line managers and lower rungs : get to know them : understand what matters to them.

Remember NOT to undermine the hierarchy and the line managers in the process. NEVER go above the line manager to give work or request information from your juniors : follow the chain of command for work.

'Getting to know' your team should never be misunderstood for 'working directly' with everyone - which is a cardinal mistake most CEOs make. So, understand the difference. GET TO KNOW YOUR TEAM personally : but, work THROUGH THE CHAIN OF COMMAND for work.

VIII. Building Leadership across the organizational hierarchy

Many organizations remain mediocre because they are over managed and under led .You need to build leaders across the organization , be they heads of a 7-person finance team or a 25- person stores or a 250-person team, they need to lead and not manage if the organization is to continue to grow.

What you need to do is to actively get 'juniors' involved in important projects : allowing them to grow as potential leaders. Give as many people as possible opportunities to get involved in leadership : never make this based on hierarchy : create a true meritocracy. Actively encourage reverse mentoring as well. Support juniors become decision makers : and don't allow 'seniors' become defensive or 'insecure.' Make leadership something anyone can take part in provided they are willing and able. Never allow leadership to be misunderstood to be 'title' or seniority.

IX. Breaking down silos - but not dismantling required power structures

Rules and controls need to be practical and adaptable to the need of the hour. Like the tide, it needs to ebb and flow as the situation demands. Yes, there is a demarcation between land and sea but it needs to be fluid.

Hierarchy in itself is not bad : but having red tape around it is disastrous. Hierarchy, if it is built around a meritocracy, there to 'support' rather than 'control', becomes a very potent purveyor of performance.

Don't get tempted to breakdown silos because it is the 'in thing.' Be careful and pragmatic about this. Structure IS required to ensure things don't disintegrate into chaos. So, don't dismantle the hierarchy per se : just ensure it is there for all the right reasons !

X. Helping Senior Managers become Coaches and Mentors

No senior manager should need to manage systems : procedures should take care of them . All senior positions are leadership positions.

Developing people, building competencies, and mentoring subordinates and planning for their future are all essential ingredients of a great leader. So, ensure that you train your Senior Managers to take on the role of a Coach and a 'Cheerleader' rather than someone who 'cracks the whip.' Over time you will see that this shift makes all the difference in rallying the team around tough objectives : and seeing things through even when the 'chips are down.'

XI. Coaching your Senior Team

Whatever the business your company is : your greatest asset are your people : and this is not just talk - it IS reality. You ultimately are only as good as your team is : and the team is as strong as its weakest link.

You need your senior team to be the best they can be . You need to make sure they get the training they need to talk passionately about what is important to the organization. Give them the confidence to try new things. Give them the opportunity to lead initiatives in their own right. Give them the space to experiment : and fail : without punitive punishment for failing. Encourage risk taking : and encourage taking responsibility for failure as well.

Remove the fear of failing - but instill the fear of being negligent.

XII. Driving Performance

Performance objectives must be explicit, simple and clearly understood by all. Ideally, objectives should be arrived at with the participation of as many levels as possible.

Try not to put out too many KPIs. They become a pain : and trying to 'mine' the 'data' to measure the KPIs often require entire departments : and becomes non value adding. So, keep the core KPIs to about : which ideally should give everyone a very clear picture of where the organisation in with regard to their overall performance and 'health.'

Try not to have only financial related KPIs. Bring in a healthy mix of indicators covering service delivery, quality, speed, engagement/ satisfaction of the team and also, levels of competency within the team.

Remember : what gets measured gets done.

Results need to be shared frequently and across as broad a spectrum of employees as possible. Many organizations find this difficult to do; but playing a cricket match without a scoreboard is unlikely to motivate the players.

Chapter 4

Setting the Right Culture

I. Understanding culture : and why it matters

Peter Drucker famously said 'Culture eats strategy for Breakfast' : and it's true...

You can have the best strategies and action plans in place : but, if you don't have the right culture, then, chances are, nothing much will happen !

The question though is what is the 'right culture.'

NEVER get tempted to look at other organizations and try and 'copy' what they do and hope that you can create a culture with a mishmash of 'best practices' : it never quite works. Culture is possibly the most unique aspect of your business : and it a wholly bad idea to 'copy' it from elsewhere. Also remember that 'changing culture' is possibly the BIGGEST and most ARDUOUS change program you will ever undertake.

Culture matters because it 'tells' people how to behave : and how not to. This is NOT done overtly by policies and procedures but by deep seated norms and practices. Often times, changing everything overtly never changes the core culture : it requires a deeper dive. Culture often becomes a stumbling block : but, culture can also be a great enabler : how you 'play' culture to benefit you is a skill you need to develop fast if you are to be a successful CEO.

A good place to start is to 'define' what type of a culture you want. Write it down in point form : and make it as simple as possible. Imagine the values you want to hold dear, imagine the principles you want to live by, imagine the things you will stand for : and if you write these down, the key pillars of your culture will emerge.

II.What to change : what NOT to change

If you want to change culture : start with the peripheral aspects first : because often, taking a jab at the fundamentals initially can generate a tougher resistance. Please don't get tempted to change culture as a 'fad' or as a populist move. Think carefully because you take a jab at any organization's culture : be prepared to take a few punches along the way : make no mistake : culture fights back - often with deadly precision !

There are always aspects of a culture that are actually GOOD. In your overzealous march to 'change the culture', don't change these too. Be careful not to be counterproductive and over eager. Take it slow : and allow the organisation to absorb the changes taking place : and get comfortable with them.

III.Doing a culture Audit : and finding out if your assumptions are true

Do a culture audit. This is a rather a 'technical' thing : so ensure you get a specialist to do it.

A culture audit fundamentally assesses your 'current culture state' and contrasts it with the 'intended culture' : and gives you the gaps : and this enables you to develop very focused and definitive action plans to bring about the culture you desire.

NEVER just barge into a series of interventions aimed at changing culture. Be strategic and long term in your approach - because otherwise you will never be able to truly change a culture.

The competing values framework might be a good start (though this is certainly NOT the ONLY tool available : it probably is one of the easiest to adopt !)

https://www.boomhogeronderwijs.nl/media/8/download_pdf_culture_assessment_workbook.pdf

IV. Working on 'key initiatives' rather than 'flavours of the month'

Once you have done the culture audit : get your core team and also a few burgeoning leaders together and develop an action plan.

- Put together DEFINITIVE action plans : not just lists of things to do
 - Align it to each of the core pillars of the 'culture of the future'.
 - Have identified leaders to drive the initiative.
 - Include these actions in the business KPIs - so that everyone understands its importance.
 - Ensure you monitor and review periodically.

V. Value Frameworks : and making them work

Something that truly drives a culture are Values. Most organizations have Values listed : but they are often never quite 'operationalized.'

Values need to be defined right : otherwise they are just words... For example : what does HONESTY MEAN inside YOUR organisation. Be careful in how you define your values : remember : they need to be PRACTICAL not idealistic per se. Values not demonstrated and lived becomes the laughing stock of the employee population and erodes any attempt to build a cohesive culture.

VI. Creating 'heroes'

'Heroes' are a double edged sword : so, choose them carefully.

True heroes inside an organisation truly inspire. If they are those who REALLY live the values, they become invaluable ambassadors for the organisation and its culture. They don't need to be 'seniors' : in fact, go out of your way to find 'heroes' from across the hierarchy : and start telling their stories : and how they live values - every day.

Story telling is an important ingredient of culture formation and change.

Never underestimate its value and impact. Get an entire communication campaign around everyday heroes who make the organisation proud : and you will find that those values they espouse will soon become what others aspire to as well.

Chapter 5
Dealing with Failures :
and Setting things up for success

I. Setting Direction and Strategy

While organisations proudly launch the vision and mission, they often fail to understand and accept that Strategic Direction is a set of plans and actions that provide consistency to the overall organisational Strategy over a period of time. While setting direction and strategy, you must also include Culture and Values to the list.

Failures are inevitable. Regardless of it being small or colossal, the saying goes: 'If you Fail to Plan, you Plan to Fail'. So while setting things up for success, also plan for failures. Your strategy must include plans and actions, not only to drive forward your organisation, but also to recover in the event of a setback or failure.

In today's context, many organisations operate globally, in some way or another. While setting direction, as a CEO, you must also take the time to understand the environment that your business operates in and factor that in too. There are many tools such as Porter's Five Forces, SWOT and PEST analysis. Spend some time analyzing the results and this will lead to 'strategic choices' that will give you and your management team the much needed insight to draw out the plan. If you don't get this right...everything else is simply left to chance!!

II. Setting Objectives and KPIs: Monitoring Objectives and KPIs

Great, you have now set your strategy and are ready to roll out the Strategic direction – remember it is still a broad statement. You need to focus your attention on setting objectives which are much narrower and precise. Using the basic SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time) principle, work out how your overall strategy will be achieved.

Granted, you will have different stakeholders, and each will have their share of contribution. At the very basic, the objectives must include the Who, What, When, Where and Why of achieving your overall organizational objectives. Ensure that you have the right measures for each objective. Set realistic targets.

Once you have planned the Objectives, your next step is to work out the Key Performance Indicator (KPI). The KPI, or the target, will enable you to measure performance over a period of time and keep a regular tab on it. A KPI aligned to the Objectives will allow you, as the CEO, to monitor progress weekly, monthly or quarterly. Ensure that once these are agreed upon, they are well defined and also documented for reference. This will allow you to plan for contingencies and emergencies while ensuring that the annual goals and overall strategy are achieved.

III. Carrying out Performance Reviews: and calling a spade a spade

Having regular chats with your directs and conducting performance reviews quarterly/half-yearly/annually, are two different things. If the former is not practiced....STOP! This is a common mistake. Whether you are complimenting or correcting, it should be done on a regular basis, where it will make more sense and add value to the employee and the organisation overall.

Performance reviews should never be a surprise to anyone. This requires open and transparent communication, establishing trust between you, as the CEO, and the management team whose responsibility is to drive your vision through the employees. Remember you are setting the tone. You will become their role model. If you get this wrong, you can rest assured, it will work the same manner downwards, impacting the overall culture.

The Performance review is almost sacred, in that it is the responsibility of both the manager and the employees to prepare. As the CEO, you need to set the right example by reviewing the entire period in question and NOT just what's on the top of your mind. Have a record, analyze it against the objectives and KPIs. Understand the factors that contributed to both success and failures. Now have that conversation!

While you are required to show empathy, respect and courtesy, you are NOT required to sugarcoat the facts. Since each objective and KPI were clearly discussed right at the point of employment or beginning of the year, a failure to meet them cannot be a surprise to the employee. If there are areas that were discussed during your regular chats but the employee has not made an effort to change, then you MUST bring that up. As a CEO, you are required to be firm when it comes to deliverables and results. Having a cup of coffee or a drink at the end of the day is a different matter. Your personal relationship should not interfere with your professional relationship!

IV. Ensuring the right resources are available

As you plan your strategy, objectives and have discussions around the topics, you will also begin to understand the need for the right resources : Not just the infrastructure, structure and the environment, which is important.

Ensure that, as the CEO, you understand each of your directs and their capabilities. Granted, this will take some serious effort and time. Nevertheless, it is a task that YOU must carry out, and not delegate. This would involve walking the floors and talking to all levels of staff to gauge the ground level situation. This will be a good indication of the leadership capabilities at each level.

Talking to each of your direct team members will then also give you an indication of their passion and understanding of the overall organisational goals and expectations. You will need to test the waters with some, coach some, switch roles for some and even let go of some, eventually. However, do these with respect and leave no room for misunderstandings. Ensure that everyone knows their responsibilities and that they will be held accountable for their respective areas. Remember, Skills can always be taught, but not Attitude!

V. Being there : to truly listen

When you go around and talk to people, always be genuine. Don't tell everyone that your door is always open, but then turn around and say you are busy. As the CEO, your plate will be full. A part of your job is also to allocate time for your directs, teams and even for those at the very end of the line.

How you set the time and how frequently, is completely up to you. With your directs, you will clearly have more frequent interactions than the rest, and that is understandable. However, when these times are set, give your fullest attention at all times. Keep that mobile away! Give them your undivided attention...that is showing respect..and when respect is given, you will also get it in return.

When you have conversations in private, the same behaviour is expected of you. Don't accept a chat invitation, if you are not willing to give the employee your time and focus. Truly listen, not hear. Give genuine advice. Show empathy. When you run into them later in the week or month, do ask them about it. It will also help build your credibility. When you have group discussions and employees share their heartfelt thoughts and suggestions, do go back to them with some response. Don't ignore, because that will be understood as you not paying attention. Be honest and transparent. It will serve you well on the long run.

VI. Taking the blame : but holding the team responsible

As humans, our natural reaction to failures is to blame others. As the CEO, when things don't go the way they were expected, you are expected to answer to your board and shareholders. As a CEO, and as the leader, take the blame. You are the captain of this ship now. You can't be the first person to jump into life boat!

Don't wash dirty linen in public: a highly respected skill and mode of behaviour. However, this does not mean that no one is held accountable. The root cause must be identified. Ask for explanations and not just excuses.

Those responsible must be held accountable. A recovery plan must be identified and timelines set to achieve the same. Make it very clear that failure to deliver will lead to repercussions....and always make good on those threats! Or you will not be taken seriously.

VII. The Balancing Act: Performance Vs. People

In today's context, we have just recovered from or are in the process of recovering from a global pandemic. Not only has the competitiveness increased, the complexity has, and every organisation needs its employees to step up now more than ever. Unfortunately, these are also times that have rocked employee's stability, creating fear and panic, which in turn, impacts employee capacity to deliver to their potential.

As a CEO, it is imperative to differentiate between Performance Management and Managing Performance. While the former is about direction, the later is about feedback and development of the individual. You need both! Failure to understand this, is a common mistake and a costly one at that in the long run.

Not only are you expected to explain in detail the strategy, objectives and the KPI, you must also be able to understand the gap between the performance and the expectations. To understand your people, you must spend time and the performance related discussion cannot be a one-off activity. There must be regular communication. There must be a strong element of trust, transparency and commitment between yourself and your directs. The balancing act is a fine art and one that will certainly take time and genuine effort to perfect.

Chapter 6

Playing the Long Game

I. Investing in the future: and at times, compromising the P&L

This is probably the greatest mistake that organizations make (specially in times of crisis.) Most look at downsizing and cost cutting as soon as the going gets tough. And one of the first to suffer is the training budget. Nothing could be as damaging as this : you need people on your teams to be constantly developing to reach their maximum potential even if this compromises your P&L in the short term. After all no organization has been known to shrink its way to greatness. Remember : tough times define you. Tough times show what TRULY matters to you. Tough times are also fantastic opportunities to truly introspect and retrospect : and solidify your team. Always invest in the future : not on the short term. A team that was shown solidarity and faith in times of crisis generally repays your understanding and generosity : and helps you leapfrog when you 'get out of the woods.'

Remember : loyalty does go both ways !

A caveat though : this is NOT to say you shouldn't resort to tightening budgets and the proverbial 'belt' in times of crisis : far from it : in fact, as a CEO, you must CONSTANTLY look at how to reduce costs and overheads : not only when things get tough. The argument is this : think long term and understand that in spite of not really 'hitting the numbers', 'prepping' your team and taking care of them in times of crisis, helps you invest in the longer term : after all, this is what retained profits are for...

II. Investing in the Team

You need to spend time and money developing your team. Remember, TIME comes before money. Very often, we make the horrible mistake of leaving 'developing the team' to countless training programs. NOTHING develops a team more than personal coaching and on the job training which is structured and focused. Nothing.

If you feel that investing in your team is a financial strain, just wait till you have to work with people who are not REALLY competent for the challenges ahead.

Constantly invest in training : and also ensuring the teams are given opportunities to grow laterally : in depth of experience : in exposure : and of course : learning from their own mistakes. The BIGGEST investment you need to make ultimately is in your own team : because ultimately, it is THEY who you will charge to deliver on the results.

III. Investing in IT and Systems and Processes

Properly structured IT is one of the most important tools for quick decision making. Information must be quickly available to all decision makers. However, you need to watch out against information overload - which usually results in utter confusion ! Systems must be engineered to ensure that they stay relevant to the times - and also, weed out what is irrelevant. Processes must be in place to ensure that the basics are done right - and feed required data to assist in the decision making process. Most great organizations are very good at this : and most who are slow in decision making are slow because they don't have the required data and information at a glance.

Remember : have the processes in place first - and build systems around the processes not the other way around - a simple but absolutely essential distinction that makes a huge difference. Systems don't necessarily have to be 'digital'. We recommend piloting a system in the simplest ways possible, fine tuning and only then, taking it digital - as this way, you will avoid incurring massive expenses in ensuring your digital platforms actually do what is required - rather than investing in digital platforms only to find out that they don't necessarily give you the benefits you want.

IV. Investing in Infrastructures

Doing well ? Well then, invest in infrastructure quickly : and ensure you buffer yourself for the future. Proper infrastructure in every aspect of the business needs to be reviewed and renewed if required. Don't wait for things to fail to fix it : especially when you are really 'hitting the numbers.' Make sure you look at aggressive growth and expansion :

but do so after investing in the infrastructure first. Growing without having the proper infrastructure is a sure way of allowing things to fall apart and get 'stretched' to the point of collapse : and trying to grow whilst trying to arrest a failing infrastructure all at the same time generally compounds the rate of failure.

V. Investing in R&D and Innovation

Probably the most important area in growing your business. However, the most common mistake made is trying to 'manage' innovation : remember : it has been said that all good work is done in defiance of management.

The issue most often is that we are unable to grasp what's been put in front of us.

Two examples :

- A. LCDs, first discovered in 1888, took a leisurely route into our lives in the 1990s.
- B. Disk brakes first developed in 1901 became main stream in vehicles only in the 1980s.

Maybe a good idea to keep looking backwards to make sure some great idea is not behind us.

The lesson to learn ? Differentiate between just coming up with 'ideas' and 'innovation' (innovation is about 'commercializing' an idea : not merely coming up with an idea) The trick is this : NEVER have innovation schemes that do not address three key aspects :

- Does it solve a problem for a customer ?
- Does it make things faster, cheaper or easier ?
- IS THERE A VALUE FOR IT ?

Unless there is a value, a great idea is just that : a great idea. Sure, you NEED good ideas to solve problems : but the caveat is this : good ideas ALONE is never enough. Get the organisation hooked on 'solving problems that matter' not just bringing ideas to the table !

VI. Investing in Building a Brand

There must be no compromise on the Brand and its identity !
Remember : you have TWO brands : one is of course what represents the product : the other is what represents the organisation : BOTH are important. Nike is BOTH an organisation AND a product : so are APPLE and Google, and countless others. BOTH brands need to be built.

You must PASSIONATELY focus on one or two aspects that define you if you are to be a truly successful organization : Toyota identified with reliability : Apple with innovation : Nike with being 'an athlete.' These are not just tag lines or branding campaigns : they are in the very DNA of the organizations : THEY DEFINE THEM!

What defines YOU ?

Chapter 7

Dealing with the 'Burden'

I. Dealing with Stress

Stress builds mostly due to one's Ego. The need to always be right : to always be at the fore : to always be a 'winner' and centering it around YOU. As soon as you can admit to not having all the answers and are big enough to ask for help, 'stress' becomes a largely more manageable issue.

II. Dealing with Negativities and Nay Sayers

Confront Nay Sayers. Openly. Let them tell 'why' it can't be done in front of the wider teams. Most naysayers are 'passively aggressive' and tend to talk behind your back rather than openly : actually, if they openly challenge you, they are NOT nay sayers at all : they are open, and very much part of your team. Nay sayers are the whiners who constantly spread negativity and drag others down with them.

Confront them. Openly.

Negativity is bound to happen : it's inevitable : but that doesn't mean you have to 'accept it.' ACT on it : rather than ignore it. As a CEO, you need to constantly spread positivity : and 'combat' negativity with the same passion and zeal you would take on new initiatives. Left alone, naysayers become a cancer that requires 'surgery' : so, nip it in the bud.

III. Dealing with Loneliness

Yes it can be lonely at the top but mostly if you try to remain aloof and 'above' your team. The moment you truly become a part of the team, there will be plenty of people to share your worries or concerns. You CANNOT expect everyone in the team to 'see' what you 'see' : but over time, with patience and a lot of effort, you CAN get a team to truly converge : and see a 'common Vision' ! The moment this happens, you are never alone : you have a team that has your back : always.

IV. Dealing with Gossip and Rumors

Gossip is a given. Rumors are the same : a given. As a leader, you must be yourself : you really can't be anyone else BUT you ! What you care about and are passionate about must be OUT THERE : in the open : aptly demonstrated by doing what you think is right and damning the consequences. This is what will build you the integrity required to squash any rumors.

Confront the gossip and the rumors, because even if people feel what you are doing is wrong, they will believe that you are doing what you think is right : and this makes all the difference. Not everyone has to agree with you : but build enough respect and credibility so that people at least know you are doing what you truly believe is for the best of everyone !

You need to keep a sharp finger on the pulse when it comes to the sentiment of the team - specially at grassroots : but this is NEVER the same as resorting to giving an ear to gossip and rumors. Create an open space for communication and opinion : but actively discourage rumors and gossip. How ? Simple. Someone carries a tale about a fellow team member : bring both parties concerned and tell them that this is what you have heard : and allow the two of them to 'settle' things then and there : that will probably be the last time anyone carries a tale to you !

V. Dealing with your own Ego

This is a simple fix. You only need to remember that the bottle neck is at the top of the bottle. Whatever issue within the organization : it is of your creation ! Remember this and your Ego will not bother you again.

VI. Dealing with conflicting priorities - work and home

The ability to balance work and home is one of the most basic skills one needs for one's success. All good CEOs and Team Leaders we have known have planned their calendars at least a year in advance, including when they will go on holidays, important family occasions, children's activities and all other 'important' events. This not only allows for great family time but 25 to 30 days of the job training for your immediate subordinates : where they have to manage 'without you' : and this is training money simply can't buy.

Remember : there is no 'family' and 'work' : there is only life. Choose how you spend your time wisely. Being a CEO does NOT mean you have to be a workaholic : in fact, YOU being one generally sends a message loud and clear to the rest of the organisation that they need to be one too : so, do everyone a favour and learn to be 'sensible' about the working hours. Remember : if you REALLY can't manage YOUR time as a CEO, it REALLY does mean you haven't learnt to delegate effectively !

Chapter 8

Developing yourself in your role

I. Mapping out YOUR next steps

Even CEOs must have future plans. Please don't make the mistake of thinking that being the CEO is the crowning moment of your life forever. Think about your next steps : and be acutely aware that you too MUST grow : and also, LEAVE.

Remember the quote from Batman ? You either die a hero or live long enough to be a villain ! The same is true being a CEO : you either leave ensuring you have propped the organization to being better after you leave : or stay long enough to actually be part of the problem !

In planning your next steps think things through : and understand your next steps need to allow you to grow both in your professional and personal life. So, think long and hard : and involve your family in the thinking and decision.

II. Finding your own Coach

It is a good idea to find yourself a personal coach. A 'coach' will be a superb sounding board for your ideas : and also, your plans. Find a coach outside of your industry and area of specialty : so that he/she can offer fresh insights and take a look at things from a different angle : something that is critical in a CEO role. Working with the Coach will help you see different perspectives before you make those all important decisions : and also, enable you to 'talk' openly : which is often delicate with your own team.

III. Committing to develop yourself

Don't forget to train yourself. Pick up a new course : there are thousands available online now : which allows you to do you training at your own pace without disrupting your work or home commitments. Every so often, DO invest in a solid academic program (at least a short program) : in a session where you meet fellow CEOs. EXPOSURE is critical to grow : so the more sessions you attend where you meet peer CEOs from varied backgrounds and industries : the more enriched you will be.

IV. Learning from other CEOs

Start creating a small conclave of fellow CEOs : from varied industries : to discuss common issues. Attrition, engagement, innovation, competition, managing the Board are all common issues for ALL CEOs : so, having a regular forum and discussion will help ALL of you. Learn from other CEOs : and be willing to share YOUR knowledge and experience freely.

V. Learning from your own team - and reverse mentoring

Make a habit of asking some of the most junior members of the team to come and teach YOU. This creates an amazingly egalitarian culture : as you personally remove the barriers based on age and tenure as an impediment to learn. For example : get your young IT resource to teach you Power BI : or Social Media Marketing : and then ask one of the young graduates to teach you the new technologies at play for the industry : or robotics. Do this openly : so that others see it : and without you even asking for it, soon enough you will find everyone learning from each other's' competencies and skills without worrying about their 'titles'.

VI. Learning new skills and 'upgrading' yourself

Constantly learn skills that may not always be about your job or industry : they can come in amazingly handy. Just learn : and you will almost automatically find ways to use it. For example : learn to 'type' properly : a skill no one really 'learns' but there IS method and structure around : which died with the 'typists' of old. Learn to type 'properly' and you will find that you finish off your emails much, much faster !

Learn new skills : make a habit of it...

Chapter 9

Essential Networks to build

I. Networks within the organisation

Remove that cloak of invisibility and start talking to people! While this may be easier said than done for many, it is a necessity. As a CEO, you may be at the helm of the organisation, but you do need allies if you wish to run an efficient and a successful business. No one person can run the organisation by themselves.

In your case, start with your directs and peers if you are part of a group of companies with other CEOs. Offer to assist and provide support where possible. The idea is to connect with people and support them to become successful. It's not about YOU! It could be to connect them with somebody or even to offer advice. Make the most of the opportunity. Grab a cup of coffee if you can.

Build a relationship with your other stakeholders, such as the board. Understand them better and be there for them. Don't restrict the networking to upward direction only. Network with anyone who is influential within the organization. It is imperative that you do this from the word GO... as you start to build your network on the 'how can I be of support?' approach, you will begin to see a pattern of trust and collaboration being established. That's a start!

II. Networks with Industry

As the CEO, you need to establish yourself and start building credibility at that level. Your role now requires you to establish business contacts and referrals. The more referrals you build the more business opportunities you create for the organisation.

The positive side of networking within the industry is that you will probably run into more likeminded individuals and they will be willing support you, as much as you are willing to support them. After all, people come for these events mostly with the same intention of mutual benefits.

This is even more beneficial for a CEO who is not from the industry, or for a business that just started. Networking opportunities allow understanding the industry dynamics. No matter how much you research, nothing compares to a good old fashioned face-to-face in-depth chat. The interaction is priceless.

III. Networks in Society

Networking is all about connectivity. Keeping presence within a community alive, and thereby, taking it to society. Particularly within a community or society within which your organization is situated, your networks make a great impact.

The recent pandemic presented a clear demarcation for many companies operating within communities. There was a clear resistance to business opening prematurely during the lockdown, which prevented business continuity. However, the organizations more connected with society found that there was actually a drive or a mutual effort to open the businesses. This could be attributed to the organization's leadership presence in the community and the efforts the leaders take to uplift society.

No man is an Island. Man (or woman) subscribes to society at some level. Connectivity and establishing your network gives you the advantage of gaining more than one inroad to any contact. Your acquaintance may not directly be of immediate consequence to your business, but they could provide you a valuable introduction.

Introductions go a long way when establishing credibility too, particularly in a digital day and age where the six degrees of separation ring true, more than ever before.

It would serve you well to remember that you are the primary brand ambassador for your business. Your reputation and connections will build those of the organisation you wish to build.

IV. Networks Internationally

In today's context, almost every business has a global connection. Whether you plan on expanding your business or are looking for a new vendor or just curious about how similar industries across the globe run their businesses, you need to connect with people on the other side of the ocean.

Networking so as to find like-minded individuals and similar businesses can help your organisation adapt best practices from around the globe.

This can support your company, not only to stand out in the local market, but also to create a pathway for your organisation to be of international standards.

As a professional, networking will lead to knowledge gain from around the globe, which will also enable you to stand your ground and be seen as a valuable contributor to conversations during local industry networking opportunities. The process will also establish you as an individual and as a professional, internationally.

Chapter 10

Leaving the RIGHT Legacy

I. When to quit and when not to

Actually, the moment you take on the mantle of a CEO, decide when you will leave : and then work backwards to understand what you need to do in order to leave by the time you decided to leave. Leave on a high : NEVER when things are tough and down. Leave when you have ensured you have created the right succession (and if you have not, then honestly you have failed as a CEO.)

Leaving RIGHT is important. You are a CEO : and what YOU do MATTERS. NEVER overstay your post : and NEVER make it impossible for the organization to exist without you. As a CEO, it is NEVER ABOUT YOU : it is about THEM : and if you have done your job right, the organization will do just fine without you : actually, it will do BETTER without you !

Have the 'I am leaving by' conversation with the Board well and early, and work with them to ensure there is a definitive timeline and an action plan for transition.

II. Train and Develop Successors

The use of plural was intentional. NEVER just create ONE successor : always create successors. Groom a few equally : and train them well. When ONE is eventually decided on to succeed you, talk to the others personally : and ensure they are supportive of the candidate chosen.

Be clear with the Board and the CEO elect to ensure the support required is garnered : and talk through the CEO elect about how to win over their peers and deal with the obvious 'jealousies' that can arise.

NEVER delay identifying and grooming successors. Do this no sooner you 'settle' in your role as a CEO. Make it clear that your time is 'limited' and start working with a small core : each of whom could replace you when the time comes...

III. How will you be remembered ?

Leaving the 'right' legacy is what it is all about. How do YOU want to be remembered ? That is a very personal question : so think it through properly. Do you want to be remembered as a superlative performer ?

An amazing person ? Someone who grew others ? Whichever you decide to be your legacy : remember, it outlasts your tenure. People REMEMBER you long after you are gone :

How do you want to be remembered ? Act accordingly !

EPILOGUE

Getting the job is only the beginning

Please don't get tempted to make your role 'only about the numbers.' A CEO is much more than someone who merely 'delivers the numbers.' You are both the custodian and the chief coach of your team : and the 'guardian' of their families and futures. Being a CEO is almost like being a parent : just that you are looking after someone else's children who happen to be YOUR team.

Make being a CEO about making a difference : to everyone around you. Make it about bringing out the best in people : individually and collectively. Make it about giving hope when there is none : and enabling individuals and teams to trust themselves and their abilities. Make it about empowerment : and responsibility. Make it about succeeding - even when the chips are down.

Someone once said that ultimately being a CEO is about two things. Giving lots of love : and making unreasonable requests. Lots of Love : because love is the charm that enables a team to truly trust. Unreasonable requests : because that is the ONLY way to TRULY test the boundaries of what is 'possible.' However, unless the Team is LOVED, then, the unreasonable request becomes a point of negativity : but WITH love, the unreasonable request becomes a DARE that they will happily take on - because they love you right back !

All the best !

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Anton is a multi-faceted professional who has had over two decades of hands on experience in process improvement, change management and strategic management. As the former AVP at HSBC DPL Anton won accolades for his superlative work there; and won the prestigious HSBC Group Service – Global Talent Management Member two years in a row. Anton currently works as a consultant focusing on efficiency and productivity improvement and process optimization for local and regional Clients.