

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

Taking your leadership skills to the next level

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Leadership Tips

How can I help? Billy King, general manager of the Brooklyn Nets basketball team, thought it was pretty cool the first time minority owner and hip-hop mogul Jay-Z emailed him. Even cooler: Asked what Jay-Z typically wants to know, King says, “How he can help.”

— Adapted from “Net Worth,” interview with Andrew Goldman, *New York Times Magazine*.

More than mastery. The National Outdoor Leadership School identifies several components of leadership. Beyond possessing competence and good judgment, you have to communicate, take action, tolerate uncertainty and adversity, be self-aware and have vision.

— Adapted from “From Incidental to Instrumental,” John Kanengieter, *The Leader*.

Take a leap of faith. NASA’s new rover, Curiosity, carries some awesome tools, including a nuclear battery and a laser to zap rocks on Mars. Best feat so far: its descent from 13,200 to 0 mph in 6.5 minutes. That required innovations scientists had tested separately but never together.

Lesson: Test it, then trust it.

— Adapted from “Curiosity on Mars,” Alicia Chang, *Associated Press*.

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Strategic Management

3 keys to measure staff engagement

Engaging your employees enhances the bottom line. When they feel like partners and care about the organization’s success, they take initiative to boost productivity and delight customers.

Retailers such as Starbucks and Best Buy track the financial lift that engaged employees provide. At a Best Buy store, the value of a 0.1% rise in engagement translates into more than \$100,000 to the store’s annual operating revenue.

How do you measure engagement? Use a system that rates staffers on three behaviors:

1. Positive messaging. Listen to how employees characterize your organization to customers, suppliers and friends. Ideally, you want to hear a glowing

description that’s conveyed with genuine enthusiasm. Less engaged employees grimace or roll their eyes while summarizing their employer in a listless or cynical tone.

2. Sense of belonging.

Highly engaged contributors identify intensely with your organization. They proudly act as a team, wear clothes with the company’s logo and serve as ambassadors who talk up the organization’s vital role in

the community. They would never think of quitting to go elsewhere.

Poorly engaged people, by contrast, detach themselves from their employer. They skip optional activities such as joining the softball team or attending a colleague’s anniversary party, and they’ll

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At a Best Buy store, the value of a 0.1% rise in engagement translates into more than \$100,000 to its annual operating revenue.

Leadership Styles

More than just \$ for this bank CEO

Early in his career, John Allison knew he possessed strong math and analytical skills. But the young banker wanted to do more than crunch numbers, so he developed as a leader.

Within months of taking a job at BB&T, a regional bank, Allison started increasing his secretary’s workload. One day, he dumped a pile of projects on her desk and she said, “I’m not doing this.”

Allison feared he’d drive her to quit. So he invested in her training, involved her in decisions and helped her derive purpose from her job. He took the approach

that by making her more successful, he’d gain success, too.

Allison also increased his self-awareness. After enrolling in a training program that identified how one’s emotional beliefs block sound decision-making, he realized that he harbored a sense that no matter how well he performed at work, he wasn’t good enough. So he spurred himself to do better while learning to listen without getting defensive.

As Allison climbed the corporate ladder—he became BB&T’s CEO in 1989

Continued on page 2

CEO and senior executive compensation

Chief Executive magazine recently completed its annual survey of CEO and senior executive compensation in private companies, based on responses from 1,100 private companies.

Here are some of the research highlights:

- The median private company CEO compensation package totaled \$362,900 in 2011.

To put this number in perspective, it is just 3.8% of the \$9.6 million median compensation package given to S&P 500 CEOs in 2011.

- Median total compensation for private company CEOs increased only 1.9% from 2010's \$356,133.
- A whopping 80.4% of private company CEOs received a bonus in 2011.
- The next most highly compensated positions in private companies by median after the CEO are, in order, President, Chief Operations Officer, and Chief Financial Officer.

The survey found that CEO and senior executive compensation is very highly correlated with company size, both in terms of company revenue and number of employees. But compensation is also strongly correlated with company performance in terms of revenue growth and profitability.

Most private companies are not following best practices to align senior executive pay with company performance, the survey reports. Private companies with institutional investors are more likely to create incentive-based executive compensation plans than sole proprietorships, partnerships or family businesses.

Keep one step ahead in arguments

When arguments arise, it's tempting to make statements to assert your claims or defend yourself. But shrewd questions work better to calm the situation.

Use these inquiries to extricate yourself from confrontational conversations:

- **If a colleague criticizes you**, ask, "Can you give an example?" When critics shift from leveling general attacks to citing specific instances, you're in a better position to evaluate the validity of their comments.

Follow up by asking, "Can you suggest any actions I can take to address your concern?" This shows you're eager to hear more and learn from others. Your receptivity, in itself, can defuse a hostile adversary.
- **If your beliefs come under attack**, resist the urge to defend or disagree. Instead, shove aside indignant feelings and play the role of an inquisitive college professor.

Say a disgruntled employee tells you, "You and your core values! You're such a hypocrite. I can't believe you say that with a straight face." Control your anger and ask, "How do you think our core values need to change?" As you brace for stinging feedback, strive to understand the full nature of the employee's

grievance before you respond.

- **If a customer adopts an apathetic tone**, your instinctive reaction might be to talk more. But before you shift into verbal overdrive, probe to determine the customer's mindset.

Ask, "What's the best way for us to spend our time?" or "What's the most pressing issue you face?" Steer the dialogue in a direction that will best serve the customer's interest.
- **If someone erupts in anger**, take a breath and remind yourself not to match or exceed the other's fury. Then pause and ask, "Do you mind if we start over?"

Highly emotional people might continue to express their anger. But keep asking succinct questions such as, "What can I do help?" or "Can we start from scratch?" Eventually, most individuals who blow off steam will exhaust themselves and agree to press the reset button.

Responding to difficult conversations with earnest questions often helps you maintain your composure. Better yet, it signals to others that you're eager to listen rather than ratchet up the tension.

— Adapted from *Power Questions*, Andrew Sobel and Jerold Panas, John Wiley & Sons. ■

More than just \$

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and served in that role for nearly 20 years—he learned to communicate more effectively with colleagues. He concluded that people have filters that can distort what they hear, and these filters often stem from childhood. He sought to remove filters so that he could listen more accurately and think more rationally.

He controlled his ambition by adopting a, "Put me in, coach," attitude. Under his leadership, BB&T grew from \$4.5 billion in assets to over \$152 billion

and became the 10th biggest U.S.-based bank.

"People ask me: When I went to the bank did I want to be CEO? Did I want to make a lot of money?," he says. "The answer is I love being CEO and I love making a lot of money. But these outcomes were never objectives of mine. My objective was to do whatever I did better than anybody had ever done it, and to enjoy it while I was doing it, and to see the connection between what I was doing and the rest of the organization."

— Adapted from "Interview With John Allison," Stephen Hicks. ■

The power of shared values



Over a 30-year career, Robert Vanourek was chief executive of Sensormatic, a \$1 billion security firm, and group vice president at Pitney Bowes, a \$5.3 billion company. He's chairman emeritus of the Vail Leadership Institute and co-author of Triple Crown Leadership.

EL: What's the most important lesson you've learned about leadership?

Vanourek: Great leadership is not a solo act. It's a group performance. You need to connect through the heart to lead effectively.

EL: But don't leaders need to act on their own to make tough decisions?

Vanourek: In a crisis, you have to listen to alternatives and make a

command decision. But if you operate like that all the time, people will wait to hear what you think. They won't think for themselves. Leaders at times bite their tongues even if they think they're right or they can do it better, as long as it's not a bet-the-company decision. They're able to listen and let others lead.

EL: Does listening come naturally to you?

Vanourek: No, I used to write a note to myself in meetings, "Be quiet. Listen." The problem is ego. Some CEOs think, "This place is lucky to have me."

EL: If you listen well, you might hear what you don't want to hear. Then what?

Vanourek: When I arrived at Sensormatic as CEO, we were burning cash. It was a turnaround, and I had Saturday morning meetings with 12 managers. One of them, let's call him Phil, always had an excuse for his poor performance. At one meeting, I couldn't stand his dog-ate-my-homework act anymore. I lost it. I slammed the table

and yelled at him. Later when we left, I asked a colleague, "What did you think?" He replied, "Well Bob, you didn't treat Phil according to our shared values." He was right. So I reconvened the meeting, apologized to Phil and asked for forgiveness.

EL: How did he respond?

Vanourek: He accepted my apology and became a dedicated team member who did extraordinary things in helping us turn around the company. That

"Great leadership is not a solo act. It's a group performance. You need to connect through the heart to lead effectively."

meeting was a watershed for us.

EL: Talk more about the role of shared values.

Vanourek: An organization needs a set of

shared values. Yet people can interpret those values in different ways. So you have to dialogue with people and be patient. That means getting them to talk about the values and their impact. And you have to get feedback from all stakeholders. That allows you to make the best decision in light of their feedback, anchoring your decisions in shared values.

EL: In your book, you write that lack of commitment and other issues can cause a breakdown in aligning values. How can a leader prevent this breakdown?

Vanourek: We list 10 steps to create alignment. I bet 95% of organizations do some, but not all, of our 10 steps. You have to do all of them, collaboratively, through dialogue. It's a continual process that requires patience, listening, repetition and reinforcement.

Editor's note: The 10 steps to the Alignment Model are: purpose, values, vision, goals, strategy, people, structure, processes, action plans and communication loops. ■

Staff engagement

Continued from page 1

jump ship if the right offer comes along.

3. Commitment to team success. You want to employ people who transcend their narrow job duties to drive the team toward ambitious goals. These motivated contributors strive for excellence rather than settle for middling performance.

Amid current challenging economic conditions, it's harder to make everyone feel like treasured team members. But as long as you level with everyone, dignify their concerns and give them myriad reasons to affiliate with your organization, you increase the odds they'll feel engaged and important.

— Adapted from "How Committed—and Motivated—Is Your Workforce?," *Aon ONE*. ■

Rise above the negativity: 3 steps

New brain science shows that constant exposure to complaining will reinforce negative thinking and behavior.

It's hard to stay positive in such a toxic environment, but you know you've got to do it for your sanity and effectiveness.

Three steps will get you there:

Step 1: Reclaim the way you interpret and react to situations.

Step 2: Create insights that separate successful people from the rest. You can position yourself to recognize and respond to good ideas.

Step 3: Proceed in ways that will turn your ideas into actions.

— Adapted from *Three Simple Steps*, Trevor Blake, BenBella Books. ■

PODCAST of the month

Avoiding the Top 10 Leadership Mistakes

Our expert presenter lays out the 10 most common—and dangerous—mistakes made by today's leaders ... and the practical ways to avoid them. Available at www.ExecLeadership.com/podcast.

What leaders do

“If you look in the mirror and don’t see plenty of flaws, you’re delusional,” says tech consultant Steve Tobak. “And companies are entirely made up of imperfect people, just like you.”

Still, he says, some leaders “more or less” know what they’re doing. These people:

- Behave like mature adults—genuine and caring—even when everybody else acts like a spoiled child.
- Entrust employees with as much responsibility as they can handle, and hold them accountable.
- Provide employees with the tools, training and support they need.
- Give honest feedback.
- Walk the talk, work hard and be hands-on when needed.
- Take the heat for team failures.

— Adapted from “10 things great bosses do,” Steve Tobak, MoneyWatch, CBS News. ■

You are the captain of your ship

“Solopreneur” is the latest moniker for people developing personal brands. And yes, one person may have several brands, such as life coach/marketer/media consultant.

Such people are self-employed. They tend to be young. And they tend to develop several lines of business, such as multiple online start-ups or various professional services.

As of 2010, according to *The Wall Street Journal*, more than one-fifth of U.S. workers were operating this way, as consultants, freelancers, free agents, contractors or solo entrepreneurs. And “current projections see the number only rising in coming years.”

Dan Schawbel is a 28-year-old marketing researcher and consultant who specializes in targeting his own generation.

“You’re competing against everyone in the world,” he says. “You can’t count on anything anymore. The only thing you can count on is investing in yourself.”

— Adapted from “You, Inc.,” Jonathan Rauch, *The Next Economy*, National Journal. ■

Motivational Leadership

Ethics and knowledge go hand-in-hand

Two concerns keep Mike McNally up at night. As CEO of Skanska USA, a construction firm, he worries that one of the company’s 50,000 employees around the world might act unethically. Just one case of bribery or false reporting of minority participation on a client job can mushroom into a reputation-destroying event.

He also frets about the risk of accidents and injuries. While Skanska trains its crews to follow safety protocols, about 1,000 laborers in the construction industry die annually. Skanska’s employees miss less time due to accidents than the industry average, thanks to its focus on safety.

But leadership involves more than emphasizing safety. McNally empowers any employee on any job site to stop working if safety concerns arise. He cites situations when individuals who noticed a safety hazard spoke up and delayed the project until the perils were addressed.

“I always say if everybody in the pool is a lifeguard, nobody gets hurt,”

he explains.

Another challenge McNally faces is spreading know-how among his employees. They engage in highly specialized tasks, and the firm gains staffing flexibility when its crews cross-train each other.

That’s why his team set up a “knowledge network” where experts on specific construction and design topics meet quarterly to share their ideas and insights.

McNally, who believes that people often quit their jobs to escape a bad boss, says that Skanska’s “Great Boss” program reduces such turnover. The program surveys the workforce to identify great bosses—and the less great.

“Employees can vote their bosses off the island,” he jokes. “We want our bosses to grow their people. We try to help them develop their skills and when they develop the people under them, the bosses move up the ladder faster. It’s a wonderful motivator.”

— Adapted from “Soft Skills for Hard Hats,” J.P. Donlon, *www.chiefexecutive.net*. ■

Emotional Intelligence

Are you a mindful leader?

If you’re a keen observer with sharp sensory perceptions, then you’re what Harvard psychology professor Ellen Langer calls “a mindful leader.”

Mindful leaders possess curiosity, openness to new ideas and an awareness of their surroundings. They resist rigid thinking and bureaucratic rules.

To increase your mindfulness, watch how others interact. Try to connect cause and effect to see how an action leads to a reaction. If you hear someone in a group giggle, for instance, note whether the laughter builds.

Mindful leaders are rapt listeners. They seek understanding, not agreement. Nothing delights them more than to learn a new fact or gain an insight.

Thanks to their listening skills,

mindful leaders are especially attuned to signs of change. They spot trends quickly, processing clues that others ignore. They’re also more emotionally intelligent, noticing colleagues’ moods.

Many entrepreneurs excel in mindfulness. After launching companies, business builders tend to resist rigid habits of thought and remain flexible and receptive to wide-ranging stimuli.

Chief executives of huge corporations can also demonstrate mindfulness. Take A.G. Lafley, former CEO of Procter & Gamble. He enjoyed visiting with customers in their homes and supermarkets, seeking out their opinions without imposing his own.

— Adapted from “13 Ways of Looking at a Leader,” Leigh Buchanan, *Inc.* ■

Turning transparency into action

Most CEOs say they want transparency. Mark Leslie means it.

Leslie ran two firms before becoming chairman and CEO of Veritas Software in 1990. He knew from experience that when senior executives make decisions based on shared information with their employees, it decreases office politics and helps everyone buy into the company's strategy.

At Veritas, he hosted weekly employee gatherings where he'd cover all relevant news and information about the company. As Veritas grew, he initiated monthly meetings for all global managers. Leslie and his executive team updated the managers on earnings projections and other measures.

By revealing as much information as he could, he sought to stifle the rumor mill and minimize the need for internal secrecy. He also figured he'd build good will by leveling with everyone and unclogging communication channels.

Leslie, 66, acknowledges that trust can backfire. Putting your faith in employees can occasionally lead to betrayal, but Leslie concludes that's a small price to pay when striving to build lasting relationships based on honesty.

A CEO who shares information turns everyone into entrepreneurs. Support personnel are more apt to take risks.

Leslie cautions that if employees suspect a CEO is faking it, trust can collapse. He champions authentic leadership where you promote organizational values that truly reflect your character and belief system.

Genuineness and information sharing paid off for Leslie. In his 11-year run as CEO, Veritas (now known as Symantec Corp.) grew from 12 to 6,000 employees. Its annual revenue soared from \$95,000 to \$1.5 billion.

— Adapted from "The Masters," Christopher Hann, *Entrepreneur*. ■

Rid your speech of weak words

Inject power into your remarks by eliminating words or phrases that weaken your message. That's easier said than done, since many leaders aren't aware of how their word choice works against them.

You already know not to apologize needlessly ("I'm sorry to have to remind you, but please submit your report by 4:00 today."). Here are some less obvious but equally important keys to communicate with clarity and force:

1. Skip the minimizing. Beware of beginning a conversation by saying, "I *only* want to talk about..." This leads listeners to think that your comments are trivial, when in fact you want to make a critical point. Instead, say, "I'd like to discuss..."

2. Avoid the waffling "might." When you respond to a request by saying, "I

might be able to do that," you create more problems than you solve. Listeners may wonder what you mean—and suspect that you lack conviction or you're hiding your true intention. It's better to make a promise forthrightly.

3. Project confidence, not doubt. By telling an employee, "If you can get to that today, we can rest easy," you're dropping a not-so-subtle hint that you want it done. A clearer alternative is to skip the indirectness and say, "When you complete that today, we can rest easy."

"If" introduces the possibility something may not occur. "When," by contrast, assumes it will occur. Using "when" conveys your faith that others will follow through—and signals that the task really matters to you.

— Adapted from *The Secret Language of Influence*, Dan Seidman, Amacom. ■



Best of the Leadership Blogs

Potty mouths

More than half of workers (51%) admit to cursing on the job, which doesn't sit well with their employers.

Of those who swear at work, almost all (95%) do it in front of co-workers, half (51%) in front of the boss, a few (13%) with senior leaders and hardly any (7%) with clients.

A solid majority of employers (64%) say they'd think less of workers who swear regularly, and almost as many say they'd be less likely to promote a potty mouth, saying it's less professional and calls into question the person's self-control, maturity and intelligence.

Now get this: Young employees, ages 18-24, are least likely to swear at work, at 42%, while employees ages 35-44 are most likely, at 58%.

U.S. cities with the most workplace swearing are, in order: Washington, D.C.; Denver; Chicago; Los Angeles; Boston; Atlanta; Minneapolis; Phoenix; New York; and Philadelphia.

Source: Mary Lorenz, The Hiring Site.

Believe in them

Pay matters for employees. Your attitude toward them matters more.

If you care about your workers and believe in them, they will remain loyal.

Lesson: Never miss a chance to express your confidence in and appreciation for your people. Where would you be without them?

Source: Doug Dickerson, Leader's Beacon.

You are the culture

Everybody is complaining about 24/7 corporate culture. Did you hear about the bridegroom's cellphone ringing on the altar?

Well, guess what? Here's the secret, says blogger Darcy Eikenberg. It's not about "the culture." It's about you. You are the culture.

Source: Darcy Eikenberg, Thought Leaders. ■

To read these full blog postings, go to www.ExecLeadership.com/bestblogs.

Crazy idea? Try it

Allison Evanow was sleeping one summer night when it hit her. She woke up next morning, turned to her husband and said, “I have this crazy idea.”

Already working in the spirits industry, Evanow had noticed a “sophisticated and energized cocktail movement.” Bartenders were using fresh, organic ingredients and taking a “chef-like approach” to making cocktails. All this, but they were still using “industrial-brand spirits.”

Evanow drew up a business plan that fall. Now her company, Square One Organic Spirits, works with an organic farming co-op in Montana that grows rye organically. The fermenting and distilling processes have to meet organic standards.

Because the spirits industry is highly regulated, Evanow’s biggest hurdle was distribution. Her best tactic was to introduce the brand in person at cocktail bars. Within six months, she had opened 100 restaurant accounts and gotten Square One named on menus, “all based on the fact that it was organic.”

— Adapted from “How I built a \$1 million business,” interview with Jane Bennett Clark, *Kiplinger’s Personal Finance*. ■

Team-building

Guide your teams to attain goals: 3 ways

Savvy leaders induce compliance rather than demand it. They guide people to think for themselves and draw their own conclusions.

To lead others in the right direction, articulate a clear goal and set a timetable for attaining it. Let the conversation unfold in three phases:

1. Discuss a deadline. After establishing the goal, say, “Let’s explore when you need to achieve it.” Solicit the employee’s thoughts on the time frame and, if necessary, cite your own preferences.

For example, a supervisor may tell you he thinks training staff on new purchasing software will take one month. You might reply, “Sounds good. But if everyone was up to speed in two weeks, we’d reap more savings sooner and that would increase your team’s year-end bonus.”

2. Define the stakes. Explore why your employee thinks the goal matters. That’s better than giving a lecture. Ask, “Why do you think this is important?”

When employees say, “This is a big project for us and here’s why,” you lead by letting others see the meaning and organizational impact of their effort. This breeds commitment and a shared spirit of success.

3. Postulate “what ifs.” Make sure employees understand the positive consequences of goal attainment—and the negative consequences if they fail. Pose hypothetical queries such as, “What if you miss the deadline?” “What if you get derailed by unexpectedly high costs?” “What if worst-case outcomes get in the way?”

By walking people through “what if” scenarios, you help them anticipate unknowns and prepare contingency plans. And you underscore the seriousness of the goal and implicitly signal how much it means to you that the employee plow ahead despite any obstacles that arise.

— Adapted from *Selling Results!*, Bill Stinnett, McGraw-Hill. ■

Effective Communication

Stop the communication overkill

Here are three words of advice to communicate well: Make it count.

Sending mass emails or holding unnecessarily frequent meetings can test employees’ patience and distract them from higher-priority work. Every time you convey nonessential information—or reinforce messages that people have already heard repeatedly—you risk undermining productivity and stoking staffers’ ire.

Both off-site employees as well as office staffers would rather field phone calls than multiple emails or in-person meetings, according to a recent study by Kathryn Fonner at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Michael Roloff at Northwestern University. By covering a series of concise points when you call, you can get your message across while minimizing distractions.

Fonner and Roloff suggest that executives provide information “stores” for employees to access data whenever they need it. They also recommend leaders allow employees to set aside blocks of quiet time for concentrated work free from incoming calls and emails.

Don’t equate leadership with overcommunicating with your team. You risk overkill if you keep sending emails or hosting meetings in an effort to foster camaraderie. Overly long emails that include lots of attachments are particularly off-putting.

The study, which included 89 telecommuters and 104 office-based respondents, also found that executives who limit interruptions reduce employees’ stress.

— Adapted from “Too many work emails?,” Rachel Emma Silverman, *The Wall Street Journal*. ■

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Building your team online



Q. I run a start-up and am looking to hire a team of people to help with everything from product development to marketing to data entry. I have heard that online labor markets such as oDesk or vWorker may be a good way to hire people, but I don't know how trustworthy they are or how best to negotiate on them. Any thoughts on taking hiring digital?

A. Online labor markets (OLMs) have been transforming the way we think about hiring and managing.

Websites such as oDesk, Elance, and vWorker allow you to gain access to applicants with a wider range of skills in farther-flung locations than would otherwise be feasible.

But these sites present challenges. To give an example of how an OLM works, let's say you are looking for a programmer to do web development. With job description and requirements in hand, you would face a series of decisions when posting on an OLM:

Decision #1: Approach them or let them approach you? If you simply posted the position, you would quickly receive a response . . . and then another, and another, and another. Some applicants might ask for more money than others, and their qualifications will vary as well. One way to alleviate this problem is to set parameters, first by allowing only targeted candidates to apply. Targeting can be done by looking at one candidate at a time to filtering candidates with a certain amount of experience.

Decision #2: Whom can you trust? The main challenge OLMs face is facilitating trust between strangers. Each potential employee has an online reputation, which is similar in many ways to an offline reputation. For example, you can look at the applicant's employment

history, including ratings and comments from previous OLM employers. Additional information can include (self-reported) biographical data and even verified skill testing by the OLM.

Decision #3: How should you negotiate? Now it's time to communicate with applicants. You may have specified a price for the job, and they will have submitted bids, leaving room for negotiation. Because these websites are competitive labor markets (and hence

known for reasonable wages from an employer's perspective), focus primarily on worker quality rather than wages. Make sure both

you and the applicant agree exactly on the deliverables and the terms of employment, such as how you will communicate and how often.

Decision #4: How should you manage employees? Almost all OLMs will facilitate their payment for you. As for managing employees, you can transition employees off of OLMs and interact with them directly (via email, telephone, and so on). (oDesk even takes screenshots to show you what your employees are doing.) OLMs prefer that you stay on the system, as they charge an ongoing commission that is a percentage of employees' wages. Think carefully about the potential benefits (quality assurance, payment facilitation) of keeping employment online versus the cost (a substantial fee). Stay aware of their quirks and balance costs against quality.

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The main challenge OLMs face is facilitating trust between strangers.

Capture fleeting thoughts, then act

For busy executives, managing time means capturing to-do items and then prioritizing what matters most. Harried people often fail to list a fleeting thought ("I need to follow up with Chris") and, as a result, forget it.

After you list to-do items, choose one or two central places where you'll store these reminders. Don't scatter your notes to the wind. And don't rely solely on electronic devices, warns David Allen, a productivity guru.

"Nothing beats paper and pen," Allen says. "The batteries never run out."

After you file all your notes in a well-established place, such as a file folder, devote a few minutes every day or two to review all your to-do reminders. Scrutinize each item and ask, "What do I need to do?"

Cleanse your email inbox periodically so that messages don't pile up. Delete what's least important and pounce on high-priority requests.

Update your project lists by acting on incoming messages as fast as possible. Allen's rule of thumb: If you can address an inquiry within two minutes, do so immediately.

He says that the best leaders possess two traits:

1. Ability to step back and organize how they think.
2. Courage to make tough decisions without all the data they'd like and without gathering input from others.

— Adapted from "How to clear your inbox, make decisions and generally get things done," Tom Fox, *WashingtonPost.com*. ■

Random Wisdom

You gotta wanna

"I never started a business that was successful, but I followed a lot of trains of enthusiasm that became successful businesses."

— Adapted from "Francis Ford Coppola's search for the best ending," Shelley DuBois, *Fortune*.



Social Mania

Social media for people who hate social media.

The art of prompting retweets

More than three-quarters of *Fortune* Global 100 companies now have at least one Twitter account. This gives them access to a loyal bunch of customers: two-thirds of brand followers say they buy the brand they follow on Twitter.

It costs you virtually nothing to tweet, so make the most of your perch.

First and foremost, understand that if you get your followers to retweet your messages, you're not only doubling your audience but also earning their endorsement.

Here's how to increase the odds that followers share your tweets:

1. Stay under 100 characters with your tweets. Yes, the maximum is 140, but you need to leave room for followers to add their own comments, such as "So true." Short tweets of 70 characters or less were retweeted nearly twice as often as tweets of more than 100 characters.

2. Keep it personal and conversational. You're talking to one person at a time.

3. Ask to be retweeted. It increases retweeting by a third. Simply say, politely: Please RT!

4. Make it practical. Although hashtags and links don't show any evidence of increasing retweets, you'll need a short URL (create it at bit.ly) to make a tweet useful. If your followers like the info, they are way more likely to share it, enhancing their own identity and helping their own followers.

5. Be timely. Playing off holidays and events is a quick way to build community. Topical content tweets are retweeted 41% more often than tweets that aren't time sensitive.

6. Build anticipation. Say "act now" or "today." Tweets that create a sense of urgency are 24% more likely to be retweeted. And tell folks to stay tuned.

Source: MIT Sloan Management Review. ■

Leadership Snapshot

Military hero shines as CEO

After flying 61 combat missions in World War II and winning the Distinguished Service Medal and other honors, Robert McDermott didn't bask in the glow of his military heroics. Instead, he helped build the Air Force Academy into a model of military education and then shifted to the private sector to become CEO of USAA, an insurance company.

When McDermott (1920-2006) retired from the military and joined USAA, he was 48 years old. A brigadier general accustomed to working around men, McDermott suddenly found himself in a corporate environment consisting of 90% women.

McDermott adjusted quickly. He expected employees to work hard but also enjoy their families, so he established a four-day workweek to give them more time at home. A supporter of continuing education, he invested heavily in employees' professional development that enabled many women

to advance their careers.

To make it easy for staffers to participate in training programs, McDermott's team persuaded universities in the San Antonio area—near USAA's headquarters—to provide courses to the company's employees after work. When McDermott arrived at USAA in 1968, employee turnover exceeded 40%. Sloppy systems and poor morale hurt productivity, even as USAA grew to become America's 16th biggest auto insurer.

To attract and retain top people, McDermott decided to buy 300 acres outside San Antonio and build a campus with many amenities including a gym, credit union and post office.

McDermott's devotion to his workforce made an impact. Turnover plummeted during his 24-year tenure as CEO, and USAA's customer base grew from 653,000 to 2.4 million.

— Adapted from *Battling Tradition*, Paul Ringenbach, Imprint Publications. ■

Turnaround Tactics

4 questions to lead change campaigns

Navigate change by first explaining the consequences of the status quo to your team. Help them understand the cost of *not* changing.

Once they realize the need to go in a different direction, assure them that you've charted a new course. Express confidence that this will propel the organization toward a brighter future.

To pave the way for a change campaign, start by asking yourself:

1. Why must our team buy into the change? List the reasons change is necessary. Identify threats that can undermine your organization's health, both sweeping trends in your industry or the economy as well as internal challenges such as obsolete systems or high turnover. Then consider how your change initiative will ward off those threats.

2. Why does our mission matter?

Review what your team actually does—the daily activity and work product—and how it ties into the overall mission of the organization.

By summarizing why your staff's job responsibilities matter, you let everyone step back and see how change can fuel success and advance the group's mission.

3. Who are our customers? Weigh how change will enhance your customers' experience or strengthen your relationship with them. Pinpoint how they benefit from your new direction.

4. What's our road map? Describe how your team will achieve change. Make it easy for everyone to understand how they will get from A to B—with B representing the destination.

— Adapted from *All In*, Adrian Gostick and Chester Elton, Free Press. ■