

Reprinted from January 8 - 21, 2010

C-suite prescriptions

'Make each day your masterpiece'

While January in Wisconsin typically brings cold weather and snow, the start of a new year also brings hopeful feelings and anticipation of what lies ahead. A new year can also be a time for making resolutions, commitments to alter or change various behaviors.

In this column, I'll offer 10 leadership resolutions for 2010. Hopefully, some of them will resonate and be helpful as you contemplate how you will lead your organization as we start the second decade of the 21st century.

At the outset, let me offer the following observation: organizational effectiveness is directly related to the level of leadership effectiveness that is provided. High-performance leaders are at the helm of high-performance organizations.

The business case for leadership development, therefore, is very solid, summarized as follows: the quality of leadership directly impacts employee capability and commitment; employee capability and commitment directly impact customer acquisition and retention. Finally, customer acquisition and retention directly impact profit, market share and shareholder value.

Do you want to improve your organization's performance during 2010? If you do, then start by making a commitment to becoming a more effective leader. To do so, start by examining the following prescriptions to see if they are applicable to your situation.

1. **Attracting, keeping, and developing good people**

Good people are the foundation of any effective organization. Jim Collins's catch phrase from his book "Good to Great" about "getting the right people on the bus" remains

relevant and important. To compete effectively in the marketplace, organizations must maximize the contributions of the employees. This is a strategic organizational concern, by the way, not a tactical matter left for the human resources department to manage.

2. **Thinking and planning strategically**

In today's fast-paced and competitive world, leaders need to be critical thinkers, systems thinkers, discontinuous thinkers and proactive decision makers. Leaders, especially top leaders, must pay attention to

100 this year, had it right. Doing things well is not a "once in awhile" occurrence for a high-performance organization. No, high-performance organizations do things well every day. Leaders in such organizations recognize that while perfection is not attainable, performance excellence is.

4. **Improving customer satisfaction**

The organizational success equation must be focused on meeting the needs of customers. Without customers, the organization has

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the Three C's of the external business environment (i.e., Customers, Competition, and Change) in order to lead adaptation and innovation efforts on an ongoing basis.

3. **Cultivating a peak performance climate**

"Make each day your masterpiece" is one of the axioms associated with John Wooden, the former UCLA men's basketball coach whose Bruin teams won ten NCAA championships in twelve years in the 1960s and 1970s. Wooden, who will turn

nothing. Brand and identity in the marketplace don't mean much if what is promised is not delivered. Work on making sure your organization "behaves into its brand" (i.e., employees carry out the brand promise to customers). Excite your customers by aligning both processes (i.e., "high tech") and interactions ("high touch"). This is a "HT2" approach that is the foundation for a high performance organization.

5. **Managing time and stress**

Taking time for self-care is essential,

especially given the “24-7” work-week expectations that permeate our Information Age. Weren’t all of those technology tools going to make our work lives easier? What become of the extra free time they were going to offer us? The prescription here is to make personal health a priority. Set parameters that separate work from personal time. Pursue a healthy diet. Build time for exercise and reflection into your weekly schedule. Choose wisely. Only you can take care of you.

6. Staying ahead of the competition

In an increasingly small world, competition is everywhere. To stay ahead of the competition, organizations need to move ahead. In today’s marketplace, status quo thinking can have dire consequences. Keeping up with the Jones’ does not provide for sufficient differentiation. The point is not to be like the competition, but rather to be different from them. Focus on adapting best practices rather than simply adopting them. Focus on what makes your organization unique and cultivating those attributes.

7. Aligning vision, strategy and behavior

A story associated with the NASA era of moon missions involves the U.S. President visiting mission control in Houston, bumping into a janitor, and asking, “Son, what do you around here?” The janitor replies,

“Sir, we put men on the moon.” A pretty powerful example of alignment, wouldn’t you say? Highly effective leaders make it a priority to link individual roles and responsibilities with work area or team goals and objectives, so that the organization’s vision and mission are fulfilled. What answer do you think you would get if you bumped into a front-line employee this afternoon and asked him/her, “What do you do around here?”

8. Maintaining work and life balance

Quality of work life is a major concern in American business today. While the recent economic challenges have been very troubling, equally troubling is the sense that work has become the focus of our existence. Leaders need to address this issue, recognizing that they are the architects of the organizations they lead. The concern here is with the organization’s “other bottom line,” its corporate culture. What are the core values, practices, and assumptions that permeate the organization? In simple terms, are you telling your employees that we “live to work” or “work to live?”

9. Improving internal processes

If organizations are going to be adaptive and nimble relative to the external business environment, then they need to be operating with maximum effectiveness with regard to the internal business environment.

Individual and collective efforts must be linked and aligned. Leaders can facilitate internal integration by attending to the “Three P’s” of Purpose, Partnership, and Process.

10. Stimulating innovation

Restlessness. Urgency today, regarding tomorrow’s opportunities. The perpetual pursuit of new ways, methods, techniques, etc. The mindset that, “We don’t rest on our laurels around here.” Reinforcement of experimentation and fine-tuning efforts. All of these are elements of building a culture of innovation. Innovation is the key to becoming and remaining a high performance organization. This is a “staying great” perspective that moves beyond “good to great.” Ongoing organizational renewal must be the goal.

Here’s hoping one or more of these New Year’s resolutions caught your eye and got you thinking a little bit. As with any other commitment, it is best to set realistic expectations when pondering how you might lead more effectively. Incremental changes are most easily navigated.

Best wishes to you and your organization for a prosperous 2010. ■

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