

The CEO Advantage: Building Executive Team Effectiveness can Accelerate Better Corporate Results

By Nancy MacKay, Ph.D

CEO challenge

A CEO reviewed his last-quarter results, which were the worst in the company's history. Despite being industry leaders, the economy had hit the organization hard.

But it was more than that. The CEO reflected on his executive team members. He knew they operated in silos, but it had grown worse with the downturn and now there were frequent conflicts. Many of the key projects they had implemented of late were either not delivered on time or on budget, and some of them were not even meeting planned objectives.

CEO mistake

The CEO had a unique style of leading. He travelled extensively and felt that executive team meetings were a waste of time. Instead, he preferred to hold ad hoc sessions on an as-needed basis.

He also ignored the conflicts between his team members.

"I hired good people and they are mature adults. I expect them to get along," he quipped.

Our leader didn't hold back on showing his frustration with the stalled and failed project initiatives and slow business results.

"They need to know when they aren't measuring up, and frankly, I should be upset," was his comment.

CEO solution

The only way to get great results is with a high-performing executive team. And if your results aren't coming fast enough, focusing on building that top team could be the solution.

With some candid feedback and requests from his team, he grew to recognize that his style was only adding to the problem. Instead, he courageously formed a plan for change.

First, he committed to meeting with each direct report for 30 minutes a week, either in person or by phone. His goal was to set his team up for success, one person at a time, and to remove any barriers or obstacles to goals.

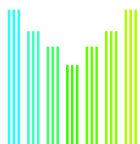
Second, he began to lead one-hour weekly executive team meetings, again by phone if necessary. The meetings had several results.

The CEO needed to build trust within the team and in him. The meetings provided the opportunity to be candid and to get to know each other better by sharing key issues and challenges each week.

The meetings also helped to bust the silos and to encourage the team members to ask each other for assistance and insight.

Instead of the finger-pointing that had gone on until now, the meetings fostered healthy conflict by clarifying who the decision-makers were and allowing the group to solve key issues and challenges together as a team.

Best of all, the meetings allowed the team to celebrate success and build confidence for future challenges.



The CEO also learned to manage conflict within the team. If two team members were in conflict, he met with them both together and individually and held them accountable for resolving the issue. He also was clear in his support for their efforts to move forward.

Lastly, the group began to hold half-day meetings to review all strategic projects, and the team set a date for a one-day annual strategy development retreat to review, plan and, yes, celebrate. •

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