

The CEO Advantage: Building Self-Esteem is Key to Handling Sudden Setbacks

By Nancy MacKay, Ph.D

CEO challenge

A very successful CEO, a leader in his industry, was so severely stressed that he wanted to quit and sell the company.

His president and partner – together they had bought the business five years earlier – had taken a sudden long-term disability leave following a divorce and illness that led to depression. The CEO had not made any succession plans nor did he know how to manage the business in the president's absence.

It was all too much for the CEO, and he didn't think he could handle it.

CEO mistake

Just about any CEO would falter in the face of the unexpected loss of a key executive, but this CEO had reacted to the situation in a way that had become destructive.

His problem rested in his low opinion of himself, which was causing him to focus on potential failure. He obsessed about letting his partners, employees and customers down. He imagined the worst situation possible, believing the company would fall apart without the president and a solution could not be found. He reprimanded himself for not having a successor in place and even said he felt he deserved to suffer.

This CEO compounded the stress by not reaching out to his friends, family and other professionals. He saw gathering support and assistance as a sign of weakness and didn't want to see his reputation ruined.

CEO solution

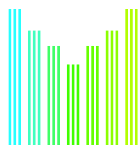
Building one's self-esteem and confidence is a life-long journey that pays big dividends to a CEO who is dealing with setbacks. But even top CEOs can struggle with big obstacles.

To cope with the sudden challenge of running the business solo, this CEO needed to take several steps to maintain his composure and perspective.

First, he was coached to reach out to others immediately and ask for help. Ironically, this helped to build his self-confidence. By letting his "I need to look good" ego get in the way, he had been missing valuable opportunities to gather suggestions and input from peers and others. Asking for help isn't a sign of weakness; it's a sign of strength and an acknowledgement that learning all one can from others can only enhance skills and knowledge.

This leader also learned to see things differently. Instead of dwelling on his lack of preparation, he began to focus on how much he could and would learn from the setback. He began to welcome the opportunity for growth and see the challenge as something to face head on.

He also needed to take care of his physical health to manage stress. He began to exercise regularly, which improved his mental well-being.



With a new attitude, the CEO worked with his team to focus on the success of the business, not its demise. They developed a massive short-term action plan to put resources into place that would manage the immediate challenge and bridge the gap between crisis and future success. •

Nancy MacKay is the president of MacKay & Associates (www.mackayandassociates.ca) and the CEO coach and facilitator of 15 CEO and executive forums across Canada with more than 150 members.

This article from Business in Vancouver October 12-18, 2010; issue 1094

Business in Vancouver (www.biv.com) has been publishing in-depth local business news, analysis and commentary since 1989. The newspaper also produces a weekly ranked list of the biggest companies and players in a wide range of B.C. industries and commercial sectors, monthly features and industry-focused sections that arm its subscribers with a complete package of local business intelligence each week.

