

The CEO Advantage: Focus on Future Business Success Not Past Failure

By Nancy MacKay, Ph.D

CEO challenge

A CEO had high expectations for his executive team and was looking to speed up execution of the company's strategy. Yet he found himself continuously frustrated because projects were often not on time, on budget or adequately meeting business needs.

CEO mistake

The CEO decided to hold a two-day session to improve project-management skills, and he kicked off the event by announcing that the executive group had a big problem with all the project failures.

One of the executives challenged that statement, saying the problem wasn't project management, it was chasing too many priorities. The team was overwhelmed and unable to deliver.

In response to the executive's candour, the CEO lost it. He stood up from his chair, pounding his fist on the table and yelled, "I'm tired of all of your excuses! If you're not committed to the success of this company, you should leave now. I'll be tearing a strip off you if that's what it takes to get you to speed up results!"

Motivating? Not really.

CEO solution

Leading should never be about berating and humiliating. Instead, you should aim to lead by influence – motivating and inspiring people to deliver extraordinary results.

As the facilitator for this session, I had the opportunity to help the CEO salvage the day. Everyone was given a 10-minute break, and the leader got a speed coaching session.

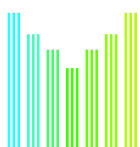
First, by showing up angry, frustrated and annoyed, the CEO had set the tone for the session and was even resorting to "crazy talk," which was clearly already having a negative impact.

Explaining that 55% of communication is body language, 38% is the tone of your voice and 7% is the words you use, the leader was encouraged to shift his body language to present himself more positively. Instead of his emotional, aggressive approach, he was shown how to sit with an open stance (shoulders back, chin up high and arms open). Though it might seem trivial, this change in his posture and approach allowed him to calm down and avoid a raised voice.

Developing a success habit of showing up in a positive emotional state every day is a big step toward motivating and inspiring the people around you.

Next, the CEO was told that his obsession with past failure was ensuring he would only realize more of the same in the future. Instead, he had to realize that the past was for learning and then letting go. He needed to focus instead on future success to motivate and inspire others, especially during tough economic times.

The CEO also needed to use motivating and inspiring questions. He was going to have to replace the accusations with encouraging words like, "I know you're up for raising the bar" and "What can I do to get you set up for success?"



Finally, the CEO had to rebuild trust by apologizing to the team for “losing it.” None of us is perfect. Apologize, learn from it and move on.

The team regrouped and instead of spending two days discussing project management, it set new priorities, identified roadblocks and strategized on next steps. •

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