

## Executive Effectiveness Drives Success In Chaotic Times

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In times of chaos, little is more essential than the effectiveness of executives. Critical areas include financial astuteness, business acumen, a nose for talent and deep industry knowledge. And most important is leadership savvy. Unless the enterprise is a sole proprietorship or small partnership, others in the organization can and should undergird any technical deficit the leader has. The role of leading the organization's success, though, lies squarely on the shoulders of the executive.

The natural tendency is to become myopic and withdraw the organization to perceived safety—a posture that stifles the very things that cause the organization to thrive. The savvy executive champions future success, connects people to the future and engenders confidence that the organization is in capable hands and that the best decisions are being made. While leaders can never provide a message of unequivocal safety, in times of great uncertainty they must reassure staff, customers and suppliers or risk losing precious, hard-fought-for ground.

### Executive Leadership Skills for Organizational Success

How are the executives in your organization doing? Consider how you might assist their development and as a result, grow the organization's success with their capacity for these six essential skills:

- Vision-focus
- Courage
- Capacity for navigating uncertainty
- Well-honed interpersonal and communication skills
- Approachability
- Team orientation

**Vision-focus** concentrates the leader's perspective on the future. Despite difficult economic times, where are we trying to take this organization? What future do we want to create? How will we measure early successes? This future focus must be cascaded throughout the organization in order to use slower business seasons as an opportunity to ready everyone for the inevitable economic turnaround.

**Courage** is required for the executive to step out into the unknown and move forward despite the uncertainty. It is essential for truth-telling with the organization. And the truth of the situation assures everyone clearly knows the plan for dealing with the reality and their role in creating the future.

**A capacity for navigating uncertainty** is the core skill for achieving the future through the lens of the present. Dealing with this paradox charts the course to the future. Not unlike a boat that encounters rough water and high wind on the journey, leaders have three choices. They can go "below" and hope for the best while the wind and waves have their way with the ship. They can turn back and deal with the same wind and waves but move in a non-productive direction. Or they can go forward, navigating the challenges, tacking with the wind and sailing the boat across the waves rather than directly into them.

**Having well-honed interpersonal and communication skills, as well as approachability**, requires the leader to

intentional vs. reactive response to the circumstances of the moment assuring they lead forward vs. slip back. In whatever way leaders move, they leave a wake behind them. Unless they intentionally exercise self control to manage that wake they will push everyone away from success.

Interpersonal skills are important for leaders at anytime but paramount in times of chaos and tumult. Staff don't follow leaders who are unable to communicate in clear and compelling ways. Leaders who truly connect with their people enable those people to bring the vision to reality. Leaders cannot realize the vision alone—it occurs through the relationships they have created throughout the organization.

**Team building** is the final important skill for executive leadership. The executive's role is to *build* teams throughout the organization and require other leaders in the organization to follow suit. This means the executive's senior team must model fabulous teaming skills at all times. Staff are watching—they are ready to follow the executive's lead. The extent to which staff create successful project, process or customer-centric teams is directly proportional to what is modeled for them. An old and true adage goes "None of us are as smart as all of us."

What are the one or two most powerful shifts that would create the greatest difference in your organization right now? Consider the areas for growth as well as the areas of strength and remember, expanding a strength may provide greater benefit than shoring up a weakness.

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