Dave Goebel's Leadership Lessons | ExCo Insights

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In this series, we explore some of the most important lessons and insights from our executive coaches and mentors. The ExCo Group executive coach and mentor Dave Goebel, Chairman at Jack in the Box, Inc., shares his lessons including the importance of practicing a hands-on approach to developing future leaders, continuously articulating the strategy, and reviewing your time allocation.

KEY LEADERSHIP LESSONS

When I reflect on my time as a CEO, one lesson that comes forward is about the importance of having an intense focus on the high-potential people one or two levels below the leadership team. You need to have a disciplined approach to clearly identify those potential future leaders and then get personally involved in their development, to say, "I'm here to support you and help in any way that I can."

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I learned that lesson when an individual left the company I was running, and we certainly did not want to lose him. I felt he had all the qualities to be an important leader of the organization someday, and I can't help but wonder that maybe he would have stayed if I had played a bigger role in communicat-

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ing how important he was to the organization and that we saw a long-term path for him there. So, I learned that you can't necessarily delegate the development of high-potentials to others.

Another big lesson I learned from my years as a CEO is that you cannot articulate strategy too often enough within your organization. You want to do it so often that people start rolling their eyes and saying, "We've got it." Sometimes, leaders can assume that there is a level of clarity about the strategy because of their meetings with their boards and their leadership teams and by sharing it twice a year in a town hall. Well, that's not the case.

You have to keep articulating that strategy over and over in one-on-ones, in town halls, and in group meetings, including with your leadership team. That helps keep everyone aligned and also helps reduce the number of stray initiatives and objectives that sometimes come into an organization that really doesn't fit with the strategy.

WHEN I COACH CLIENTS, WE OFTEN TALK ABOUT...

Many of the conversations I have with CEOs and other senior leaders fall under the broad heading of time allocation. And we often start those discussions with a review of their calendar over the last 90 days. Where are you spending your time? And I ask that question in the context of what gifts you bring to the organization. What are the things that you can uniquely do to drive the business forward? But I often see a pretty big disconnect. People will talk about what they believe they bring to the organization to move it forward, but when you do a time allocation study, you often discover that a very small percentage of their time is being spent on those things. Instead, it's being gobbled up by people finding their way onto the calendar by carrying forward some traditions that get in the way of the really important work they need to be doing.

Another common conversation starts with me asking them how they would rate the clarity of their strategy. And most of the time, I give them a pretty good score. But then, I shift the discussion to the structure of the organization. Far too often, what we discover is that the legacy structure remains in place even though there have been many new iterations of the strategy. So, the organization is not built for optimal performance, and it's time to take a fresh approach to how the organization is structured to support the new strategy.