



The Best Leaders Know How To Build Meaningful Relationships | Anne Lebel

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In this strategic CHRO interview, Anne Lebel, Group CHRO of Capgemini, shares her key leadership lessons, including building professional relationships and practicing self-awareness, with The ExCo Group CEO David Reimer and Senior Managing Director and Partner Adam Bryant.

Reimer: What are top-of-mind HR challenges for you right now?

Lebel: One is skills transformation and the importance of building, acquiring, and developing the right skills to serve our clients and strategy best. We're also still progressing on implementing new ways of working.

We introduced a hybrid work model a few years ago. We still have questions and issues regarding returning to the office because it is not easy to make a hybrid work model work really well. Another big challenge, of course, is the acceleration of technology disruptions and the introduction of Gen AI.

Bryant: How do you think AI is going to transform HR?

Lebel: I see it as more of an opportunity than as a threat, and it is creating a lot of opportunities in terms of efficiency for transactional work with smart automation. It's going to disrupt our talent acquisition activities, and it's going to make them much more agile. It will help us accelerate our skills trans-

formation and provide better opportunities to our people as we can use AI to drive all the matching of demand and supply in terms of skills.

But then there are bigger questions, such as how do we ensure we have an ethical approach to using AI? For example, depending on the way you use AI, you can introduce a lot of bias in the way you hire.

Reimer: What are the X factors that separate the best managers and leaders these days?

Lebel: Leaders need to be much stronger on the people side of the role. We can no longer have leaders who are only focused on business performance and who have a transactional relationship with their employees.

We need leaders who are better able to anticipate and think strategically and leaders who are able to collaborate differently and think beyond just their own business area. The era of the solo hero is definitely over.

Bryant: What was it about your background that prepared you for this kind of role where every day presents a new challenge?

Lebel: My parents always pushed me to grow as much as possible, to be curious, and to pursue activities in many different areas. I was educated in a family where television was banned, so my childhood was about learning about history and culture, playing music and sports, and traveling.

My parents always pushed me not to have ambition just for the sake of being ambitious or earning money. It was more about keeping an open mind. I studied political science, which teaches you how to look at situations from different angles, analyze them, and take into account all the history and background.

Reimer: What was a big leadership lesson for you early in your career?

Lebel: It was the first time I realized that leadership was not just about being strong technically. I was in consulting, and I had to manage a team on a very difficult project. Everyone on the team was much better than me, technically. They were strong characters, and they would challenge me all the time. It took me some time to find my space and to understand the greatest value I could bring to the team and the project.

It was about keeping the direction, and the team mobilized, managing their anxieties and fears because it was a very difficult project, and figuring out how to get the best out of each person. That's probably the first time I felt that leading a team was different than just being a technical team leader who could provide solutions.

Bryant: When you mentor and coach executives, what themes come up most often?

Lebel: I'm often surprised by how little people pay attention to self-awareness. Nobody is perfect. We all have our limits, but we also all have our strengths. But people often don't spend enough time thinking about what they like to do, what they don't like, and what would help them perform at their best.

Every time I have pushed myself out of my comfort zone for a new opportunity, I have always taken

the time to think about the value I could bring. What would make me happy in the job? What would give me the energy and the drive to be successful in that job?

Reimer: What is the most valuable lesson you've learned from one of your worst managers?

Lebel: It's about respecting people and seeing them as a whole person. I remember coming back from maternity leave after having twins. I've always been a hard worker, and my boss knew I was a hard worker. One morning, I got to work a bit later than usual because of everything I had to do that morning with the kids. When I arrived, he looked at me, then looked at his watch, and said, "Is this now going to be your new schedule?"

At that moment, I wondered why I had gone the extra mile for him in the past. The lesson was that building professional relationships and the quality of them are important factors. Knowing how to build those relationships separates the best managers and leaders from everyone else.

This interview with Anne Lebel, Group CHRO of Capgemini, on the importance of building professional relationships, is part of our Strategic CHRO interview series with transformation HR leaders. Subscribe for future interviews.