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Rebecca Macieira-Kaufmann'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 Rebecca Macieira-Kaufmann, former CEO Banamex USA; Former President - Citibank CA, shares her lessons, including her “be you, act ‘as if’” approach, finding time to step back, and other leadership lessons.

KEY LEADERSHIP LESSONS

A key leadership lesson that has served me well throughout my career is to be like a duck and let things roll off my back. And by doing that, especially in challenging moments, it buys you time to step back and make the best decision. I learned that lesson when some things were not going as planned in the company I was working in at the time. There was tension in the meetings, and I felt the need to solve everything. I was in a junior role at the time, and I remember my manager saying to me, “All these arrows flying around are not aimed at you. You don’t have to stand up and take them. They’re actually aimed at other people.” That allowed me step back in moments like that to observe and think, what’s really going on in this room? There are some things that might be for me to own, but for the others, I’m not going to take away the opportunity from my colleagues to learn from that lesson just because of my bias for action.

A second big leadership lesson I learned was to be you, and act “as if.” I put those two together because, as I went through my career, I often thought I had to have XYZ attributes to step into a leadership role. But then I learned that the more I leaned into just being me, the more effective I was versus trying to be something else. For example, I’m super high energy and very engaged. I love interacting with people. So I tell people, don’t try to be some concept you have of what you think a leader should be, be you!

And part of that is acting “as if,” in those moments when you’re in more senior roles and you might be feeling a bit of imposter syndrome. But I just keep telling myself, “They gave me the job, so let me do it.” That was my approach when I became a CEO, and when I become chair of a board.

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



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One theme that comes up often is the importance of creating a culture of ownership and accountability. That seems to be hard for many clients. And so what are those practices? And how do you ensure that you look for those qualities when recruiting and hiring talent, rather than focusing on a particular job spec? It starts with having a talent mindset. You always have to be looking for talent. When you’re at a conference, for example, are you meeting people and looking at them as potential talent for your company?

To create a culture of ownership and accountability, you need clarity around priorities and goals. And then what are the habits of the teams that are responsible for those priorities? What are the numbers they track, and how often do they check them? I’m always amazed at how many people have all these goals, and yet none of them look at the dashboard every week or two weeks to monitor progress. And so it’s not surprising that they don’t have an ownership culture. If you’re not inspecting what you expect, you’re not instilling an ownership culture.

Another big theme is the importance of staying focused on your North Star. Given everything that’s going on in the world, it’s easy to become distracted on other issues that are important but may not have anything to do with your company. So I often will have conversations with people to understand what they are focused on to drive the business forward. And I might have a conversation that goes on for a full hour without the issue of driving revenue ever coming up. That’s not to say there aren’t bigger issues that driving revenue. We can all give back to the community, and we can all help take care of the planet. But companies won’t exist to do those good things if they are not driving top-line growth and bottom-line growth. So we have to balance all those.