



Juan Pujadas' Leadership Lessons | ExCo Insights

April 15, 2024

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 Juan Pujadas, Former Vice Chairman PwC, shares his lessons, including winning over the majority, how to deal with defeat, and the importance of interpersonal relations.

KEY LEADERSHIP LESSONS

When you are in a leadership position, everybody is watching you. You have to be sensitive to that, and realize that, even with the best of intentions, you might say something that will offend somebody. It can be very hard to gauge how a statement or comment will be received by every single person who hears it. Everybody is going to have an opinion about what you say, and you're not going to win over everybody. But you're going to have to win over the majority of people to be an effective communicator and an effective leader of change.

I learned that lesson when we held a big conference in Orlando for our employees. It was a trying situation, and the arrival experience to the conference did not go smoothly. We had invited everybody in the group and their families to the event. Most of us were at the main hotel with access to the

ballrooms and dining rooms. But we also had people staying in the overflow hotels a couple of miles away. But there was a lot of rain that week, and not all the busses to bring them to the main hotel were on time.

During my remarks, I had made an off-hand comment about how some of them were late to our session. In the feedback about the session a couple of days later, there were some angry comments, saying that I shouldn't have made light of the fact that they were late, given that some of the instructors had kept them late in previous sessions and they then had to walk through two hotel buildings to the main session. Part of me was thinking, this is a professional environment, and you should be here on time. But I should have been more sensitive to the complexity of the environment. I shouldn't have made a comment that wasn't going to be funny to everybody.

The lesson I took away from that moment was that I was going to be super sensitive in all my interactions from that moment on. After that, whenever I walk into a meeting or gathering, I'm very careful about asking people how they are and then listening to their answers. I try really hard to make sure that I'm inclusive with everybody, regardless of their title or role.

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Another key lesson I learned was about how to deal with defeat—that you're probably going to win more than your fair share of the battles, but you're not going to win them all. And when that happens, you can't go into a funk. It's not productive because it just slows you down from doing what you need to do. So you acknowledge what happened, be honest with yourself and others, and then move forward. In leadership roles, you often have to tell people that decisions did not go their way. And you have to convey those messages in a way that brings people along. One of the best ways to do that is to give them the context for the decision, and then say, "I still need you to be part of the team and move this plan forward." That is a hard lesson for some people, particularly because there isn't always the time to go through that dialogue.

I learned that lesson myself when I was told that one of my ideas was not going to be implemented. Maybe it was a sign of my immaturity at the time, but I was surprised, because I was certain my idea was the best one. But as a younger leader of a team, I had to be mature enough to understand that my idea was just one of many that was being considered. You have to maintain an even keel to be an effective leader.

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

One theme that comes up is that people sometimes don't pay enough attention to interpersonal relations in a direct and explicit way as part of their leadership style. Instead, they tend to manage by the numbers or by setting policy. There's a lot more to building the team than simply saying, "We're going to do this and that." You have to slow down and spend time unpacking the plan, including why we're doing it, why it's important and what it means for everybody. Because not everyone is at the same experience level. And when you have people from different disciplines and backgrounds on the team—including, say, engineers, auditors, consultants and operations people—that means they are

not starting from the same place on the change management program. You can't ignore the human component and go straight to strategy.

Another frequent conversation is around making a possible career change. The circumstances are usually that they are not happy in their current field, but that it's hard for them to imagine giving up their salary and benefits. By the way, Covid made it easier to have that conversation, because people were under a lot of stress and started questioning some decisions they had made in their lives. And so you help people think through the implications of changing careers. What's holding them back? What will they have to sacrifice to make a change? And are they clear-eyed about the risks and challenges of starting a new chapter?

I use a very simple model to help guide the conversation—heart, mind, and wallet. And that means, are you passionate about what you are doing? Is the work intellectually challenging? And do you think the compensation's fair? If those three things are in balance, you're in a good spot. But when one of those things gets out of balance, it often leads people to wonder about making a career change.