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Pamela Goldberg's Leadership Lessons

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In this series, we explore some of the most important lessons and insights from our executive coaches and mentors. Pamela Goldberg, The ExCo Group executive coach and mentor and former President and CEO of the Medical Device Innovation Consortium (MDIC), shares her lessons, including the importance of diversity, taking the opportunity to be a better listener than a talker, and the value of personal connections within an organization.

KEY LEADERSHIP LESSONS

An early lesson I learned as a leader was bringing diversity of thought to problem-solving. We tend to think about diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender, but it also includes diversity of background and expertise. I always found that different voices and perspectives always enhanced decision-making.

In my last company, my team was 50 percent people of color. I learned so much from everyone around the table. The company was focused on healthcare, and there are many diversity challenges in the healthcare realm. So, having all those different voices on our leadership team really made a difference in our ability to address those challenges for our community.

I learned the importance of diversity because, from the early days of my career, I was a woman in a man's environment and often the only female voice at a table. That's where I gained that initial sensitivity. I had a finance background, and I found that working with people with different areas of expertise, like marketing and operations, always enhanced my thinking and helped me gain a fresh perspective on issues. It wasn't until I was running a company that I had the opportunity to really focus on that and hire people to maximize those opportunities for diverse thinking.

A second key lesson for me came from the fact that when I first became a leader, I thought I had to have all the answers. Over time, I came to realize that if I were a better listener than a talker, then I'd have a better opportunity to learn from others. So, I realized that if I were a better listener than a talker, bringing those listening skills together with a diverse team would make a great difference. I've always reminded myself and others that there's a reason we have two ears and one mouth—to spend more time listening than talking.

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

Many clients tell me that they feel as if they always have to tell their people what to do and make decisions for them. So, I always encourage my clients to empower their team members to come up with good ideas so that they can leverage their team's talents and skills. When you do that, it makes people feel more valued and makes them more likely to be strong contributors, which benefits the leader. It's a real win-win.

Another common theme is that I'm amazed at how often I have to remind leaders not to get siloed within their own area of the organization and within their own team. They need to build relationships with peers across the organization. And there are many reasons for doing that. One is to gain a greater understanding of all the different aspects of the business beyond one's own purview.

Also, the personal connections from investing in those relationships lead to shared problem-solving and greater opportunities for personal growth. People sometimes say that they are often too busy to talk to people from other parts of the organization. But when they do make the extra effort, they all tell me how much they've learned from those relationships.