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Lynn Crump-Caine 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.

Lynn Crump-Caine, an executive coach and mentor at The ExCo Group, Board Chair at Wingstop, Director at Advocate Healthcare and Thrivent Financial, and the former EVP and COO of McDonald's, imparts her leadership wisdom. She emphasizes that we manage things and lead people, the importance of consistency in personal and business values, and how conversations about prioritization help drive results.

KEY LEADERSHIP LESSONS

An important lesson for me was learning that we manage things and we lead people. That's a big distinction that I didn't fully appreciate early on in my career. As you move up in an organization, with more responsibility, you can find yourself focusing on the metrics and outputs, even though we know as leaders that it really is about people. And so you always have to remind yourself that you manage things and you lead people, and leadership is about being able to inspire and motivate people to bring their A-game, to want to excel, to work as a team, and to be innovative.

Because of that moment, I made much more of an effort to connect with people on my teams in a more personal way. I started roaming the halls more at the office and being more available outside of our normal meetings, just to get to know as many people as possible at a very human level. I believe that being relatable and authentic beyond work and the task at hand is critical and pays dividends in the work environment.

The second lesson is closely linked—that people need to know who you are and what you stand for so that they know how you’re going to behave when times are tough. If they know that they are always going to be treated with respect and dignity and that you are there to help them, then they will give you their best effort. There has to be consistency of character with both your personal values and your business values.

For example, one thing I would often repeat to my teams is, “Don’t get lost in the small things.” You

have to know what’s really important because people will make mistakes and we will have misses. And when there are misses, we need to treat them as a learning moment so that you don’t stub the same toe on the same post again. Let’s be each other’s cheerleaders and let’s get the job done. And even in the most difficult situations—such as a business transformation or a downsizing, when a person finds themselves not included in the go-forward plan—I can say from personal experience that it matters when people know that you care and that they can count on you in all circumstances to have done your best for them.

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

One theme that comes up often is how they relate to their stakeholders and partners, up, down, and across their organization. What do you know about them? What do they know about you?

How do you manage driving for results? And how do you manage challenges? Those conversations are often the richest because they typically have a lot of stakeholders who have to be managed differently. That conversation is also about prioritization because everyone is grappling with so much right now. So they have to be thoughtful about how they manage their time to drive results, particularly the time they need to invest in those stakeholder relationships.

Another common theme is that leaders are now thinking more about themselves than they have in years past. Does their role bring them joy? Are they doing what they want to be doing? Are they happy with the impact they’re having? Their answers to those questions affect their outcomes at work, and they affect their lives and their families, as well. So I’ve been in a lot of conversations lately about whether people are doing really what they want to be doing. One reason that it’s more on their minds is that, in the past, it was easier to achieve a measure of success combined with passion. But everything is so much more complex now. People are working in organizations where the reporting structures have evolved and will continue to evolve. Some are more matrixed, and some are increasingly leveraging cross-functional teams and other models. Then there’s the impact of digital tools and remote working and their impact on the complexity of the workplace. Finally, just the pace of change is speeding up so much. All of that leads to people reflecting more on whether they are doing what they truly want to be doing.