

Effective executives understand how to keep all of the problems in perspective

By Ben Ochs

For many executives, days are filled with issues of immediacy. Items need their attention, all of them exceedingly important. Senior team members approach them with major project decisions. Clients want answers. The mergers and acquisitions team has new information that will affect the big deal. Media want a reaction to the latest crisis.

Some veteran executives handle these demands with relative calm. Others find it difficult to focus. What is the difference?

The difference is perspective. While pressing issues distract some leaders and add stress to others, the veteran executive keeps demands at arm's length where it is easier to focus.

Perspective makes it easier to delegate appropriately. It brings confidence to empowerment decisions. It offers the breathing room necessary for maintaining a sense of calm in rough seas. It contributes to an executive's wisdom. It provides context.

The benefits of perspective instill a sense of confidence in the rank and file of the company. What they see when they look to the executive offices is stability, strength and competence. If the company were a ship, an executive with perspective is like a large rudder providing direction and maintaining course even in inclement weather.

The inexperienced executive is akin to an undersized rudder, overcorrecting when hit with the unexpected and producing a meandering course. The rank and file sense nervousness, indecision and fear.

As intangible as perspective is, it has direct effect on the bottom line. Employees who see strength and competence in their executives move more freely, think more creatively, show more loyalty, make better use of resources and have more energy than the employees of lesser executives.

So, how does one gain perspective?

For the senior executive, perspective comes from a variety of sources. The most influential is time, though time in the wrong culture around the wrong role models may ingrain bad habits. The advantage lies in gaining valuable perspective regardless of the environment in which one works, and to gain perspective faster than one's peers.

Established, effective senior executives throughout history point to mentors, friends, formal and informal advisors and diligent study as their most beneficial and reliable resources. By gaining perspective from a variety of resources, time spent with poor role models presents opportunities to witness what does not work. Sharp executives learn from others' missteps.

The various influences coalesce to establish an executive's unique philosophy upon which decisions are based. This philosophy guides their responses to crises. It gives them the presence of mind to formulate cogent, adroit commentary when blindsided by provocative statements, challenges or questions.

We admire executives with presence who appear unshakable, yet remain approachable and adept at conversation, and who make things happen. Perspective is at the core of their success.

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