

Top 7 CEO Mistakes

by Helen M. Mitchell

Helen M. Mitchell founded Strategic Management after investing more than 15 years analyzing, diagnosing and building organizations for growth and profitability in the technology sector of both Fortune 500 and privately held companies. With a proven track record of building organizations and teams, Helen was a Sales Vice President with Lucent Technologies at the age of 30 and by the age of 35, Helen held P&L responsibility of a \$.5Billion organization within Avaya Inc. She is an authority on helping companies see, find and get “business traction”. As a trusted advisor to business owners and executives throughout Southern California, Helen consults with and coaches CEO’s and business owners to assess their business on why they are spinning their wheels and to develop a strategy to position the company for long term growth and profitability through the integration of strategic plans and operational and organizational plans. Helen serves as an Officer on the board of directors of the YMCA of Orange County and is President of the Association for Strategic Planning in Orange County. For more info, visit Strategic Management Resources www.strategicmgtresources.com

Leadership is one of the more commonly used terms in business with more books and articles written on this topic than most anything else. If you Google the term “leadership”, you will get everything from networks, to coaching to theories to case studies and key note speakers to explain it all to you in less than an hour.

After years of working with CEO’s and executives across different industries and company sizes, I have found that each person’s style and leadership is different but when they capitalize on their own unique strengths they are quite powerful. But I have also observed that all great leaders share the possibility of making the same seven most common mistakes:

1. Friend or Foe

While most CEO’s will acknowledge that their people are their most important asset and the company wouldn’t be it is without the employees, it is then amazing at how reluctant most CEO’s are to get out of the office. The old idea of “management by walking around”. Not only are people more apt to approach you in “their territory,” but you will hear and see things about your employees and the business that you would not otherwise. How can people trust, respect and follow someone they don’t know?

2. Hands on/Hands off

One size does not fit all! Too many CEO’s say, this is my management style. Period. No flexibility and no modifications based on the people, skill set or experience. The fine art of leadership and building a management team is knowing when to abdicate or empower and when to micro manage. Within a given project or employee, both of these styles may be used. The skill is knowing when and how to

do that in such a way to simultaneously grow your employee and company.

3. Numbers vs. People

With everything there is balance. The numbers are only a by-product of what is happening in the company. By taking actions to change the numbers without investigating and managing what generates those numbers – employees, technology, operations and customers, is ultimately destructive. The numbers are just a place to start asking questions. If your numbers are not good, then you need to start asking some tough questions!

4. Always flying at the same altitude

One important role of the CEO is to be the visionary and think big and broad. However, progress on a new initiative or strategy usually gets thwarted when the vision hits implementation. With some level of investigation before and during the launch to assess what needs to change and enroll the people who will be affected will increase probability of success.

5. The Ostrich or The Bear

Most people don't like to handle or manage conflict but those that do it effectively are seen as trusted and fair leaders. The CEO who is not proactive and only manages conflict when it has become a crisis will not have an organization that acts as a team. Conflict should not be avoided but rather seen as an opportunity to build teamwork and to model trust, respect, honesty and truth. Address the problem not the person and just the facts. Just the facts.

6. Not managing your “People Investment Portfolio”

Honest performance feedback against measurable and attainable objectives is the guide to growing and developing your workforce and building a culture of performance. The high achievers will want to beat expectations and be rewarded for their results. The opposite of a results driven company is one of mediocrity.

7. A clear compass heading

The CEO is the one that paints the future world of “what could be”. By having a clear and concise view of who the company can be and clearly communicating that in the organization, people are more likely to see how they can contribute. Think big and don't limit yourself by what is today.

The key ingredient in leadership is not power but influence.