

首次担任CEO的人的表象与实质

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很多年以前,我曾在一家从政府机构剥离出来的科技企业担任董事会成员。当时公司需要聘请一名CEO。一位名叫乔的男士被选中,他曾长期担任一家美国大型软件公司的高级主管。

我们对自己的选择非常满意。乔非常善于销售,而销售正是公司主要关注的方向。乔成熟、自信、富有经验,而且风度翩翩、魅力超凡。很快,员工们便喜欢上了他。这更加使我们觉得他是这个职位的最佳人选,我们相信企业在乔的领导下,未来一定会发展得非常好。

起先,一切都非常顺利。销售渠道顺利地打开了。他又加大了对人员的招聘力度,尤其是在销售领域。然而,一些问题也开始出现了。乔解雇了部分产品开发人员,并且提高了销售人员的待遇。他有着非常昂贵的品味,这一点从他的新办公室里的家具就可见一斑,他的交际费用非常高,出行只选择头等舱。

但他解释这一切都是拓展销售所必需的,董事会也同意了他的观点。毕竟,他在销售方面有着非常傲人的业绩,也有许多在大型企业工作的经

验。这些只是为达到后期成功所必需的前期投入而已。

但成功并未如约而至。销售部门的花费呈直线上升,而销售额却在逐渐减少。一年后,我们必须解雇乔,而这家公司也没能东山再起。最后,我们不得不将这家公司一文不值地卖给了一个竞争者。

我们选择了错误的CEO才发生了如此恶果。其实,作为CEO,乔只是虚有其表,并没有实质的能力。他说得天花乱坠,愚弄了我们,也愚弄了他自己。他甚至不知道他根本不适合担任CEO。

但事实上,乔确实是一位非常优秀的执行者。他曾经在销售方面做得非常成功,也拥有许多执行经验。但问题是,一名优秀的甚至是卓越的执行者并不意味着你有能力成为一名优秀的甚至是普通的CEO。乔就是这样一位优秀的执行者,但也是一位无可救药的CEO。

首次担任有难题

很不幸的是,虚有其表而无实际能力是人们第一次担任CEO时常常会发生的情况。没有人会教你如何做一名CEO。第一次担任CEO时,你没有任何同类型的经验。你可以想象这个职位是什么样,你可以告诉自己在成为CEO之前你曾有过许多担任高层职位的经验,但不能忽略的事实是,之前你从未担任过CEO,你确实不知道应该如何做一名CEO。

即使在一家小企业里担任CEO,也会面对很多诱惑。人们往往因为你的头衔而尊敬你、附和你,即使你并不值得他们这样做。你的雇员对你与对待他人有很大不同,他们会为你的笑话而大笑不止,即便这些笑话可能真的很无趣。他们往往不告诉你真相,因为他们认为你可能并不想知道。供应商和销售商会经常请你吃喝玩乐,把你当做客户一样对待。

这些都会使一个人自负、虚荣,即使他们本身



可能并不是这样。如果他们在担任CEO之前就是一个自负、虚荣的人,那么坐上这个职位后他们会变得更糟。通常,当一个CEO由于虚有其表这一点而导致即将走向失败时,往往会出现一些信号。比如他喜欢与别人享用昂贵的美食、拥有昂贵的车、在自己的形象以及公关方面投入很多、不愿意听到事实、试图向员工展示自己懂得更多、不允许雇员发出不同的声音以及在做出错误决定后不在员工面前承认错误。

当然,还有许多别的信号,以上只是一些比较明显的信号。但是,如果一个CEO有其中一个或者更多征兆的时候,这基本上就显示出他更注重于表象而忽略本质。在这种情况下,董事会就必须予以重视,因为这个人可能不适合担任CEO,即使他在赚钱。如果当一名CEO的雇员、投资者和董事会都不再信任他时,往往可能会导致企业最终走向失败。

当雇员不再信任他时,一些优秀的员工可能会离职,而那些不符合标准的员工将会留下,而且他会发现很难再吸引一些优秀的员工加入公司。他的产品开发和销售会遭遇困难,他的雇员也将无法想出新的观点来帮助公司。

如果由于他不负责任地肆意乱花投资者的钱,把钱用在如何让自己看起来更好,而不是公司的利益上时,投资者将不再相信他。这意味着投资者将不会再为公司增资,也不会让他们的朋友投资这家公司,因此,这家公司可能会步入资金用尽的困境。

当董事会看到员工和投资者都对公司CEO失去信心、而且发现这名CEO越来越注重表象而不是实质时,董事会也将不再相信他,也将不会帮助他带领公司走向成功。

第一次担任CEO的培训

对一家相对较新的公司的可信任CEO进行培训,可以采用一些小技巧。

在一个人没有坐上权力的位置时,你无法看到他的本性。一个首次担任CEO的人不会提前知道当他坐上拥有很多权力的位置时将如何表现。他或许会认为自己将谦卑地、负责任地行动和做事。有些人会这样,但也有很多人做不到这一点。你无法预知他在这个拥有权力的位置上是否能够谦卑

地做事,因为大多数人在第一次担任CEO时都会假设他们能做得很好。

如果他们没能像一个真正的CEO那样表现得很好,被权力冲昏了头脑,他们不会意识到这些事情已经实实在在地发生在了他们身上。他们只会相信他们正在像大多数CEO那样负责任地做事。

同样,当他们做得像一个第一次担任CEO的人那样差,他们的雇员不会告诉他,因为他们有所顾忌。因此,新的CEO永远不会知道他们的行为很愚蠢、很自大。

你的雇员会看到有关你的一切,即使你并没有意识到。你的雇员看到你每天面对许多不同的问题,做出不同的决定,因此,他们很快地就会了解你的一切,包括你的优点和弱点。如果他们不喜欢你或者看到你犯了一个大错误,他们不会告诉你,但是,他们会假装很喜欢你,会让你觉得你做得决定是正确的,即使这些决策非常糟糕。

如果你能够使你的雇员相信你,他们会成为你的无价之宝,为你出谋划策。如果他们不相信你,你将永远无法得到他们的支持和帮助,那么你距离失败可能只有几步之遥了。运营一家好的公司非常难,因此,你需要获得所有你能够获得的支持与帮助。

你做的每件事都透露了有关你和你的期望的信号,即使你并不知道你已经传递了这些信号。第一次成为一名CEO时,最令人不安的是人们正在看着你的每一个行动和决定。他们甚至在观察你的身体语言、你的面部表情、你的反应和回答。因为这一切的举动都向他们传递着你是谁、你期待什么以及你将如何回应他们工作的信号。

当然,这些事情在你没有成为CEO的时候也在发生,但作为一名CEO,你的雇员会特别关注你的各个方面。因为,现在你对他们而言拥有许多权力,包括解雇他们、帮助他们、给他们更多更好的权力和利益。

如果你是第一次担任CEO,而你又几乎不了解这些事情。你可能不会理解,即使是一个很小的决定、很小的动作,甚至是一个很细微的面部表情,都可能被员工很仔细地观察,被他们解读为这对你意味着什么,对你的每一个员工意味着什么。

有时候,因为一个小小的面部表情,你可能会看起来有些不高兴,这会被员工观察到,然后被解释

为某种意思。即使你其实并没有不高兴,但也已经晚矣,因为你已经将这些信息传递给了你的雇员。

因此,作为一名首次担任CEO的人,你必须非常注意你的面部表情、你的反应、你的身体语言和你的决定。无论未来你的雇员是否相信和支持你,这都会对他们如何回应你产生巨大影响。

作为一名首次上任的CEO,你最有力的工具是向你的员工倾听,无论他们是多么初级的员工。作为一名CEO,你可能会觉得你知道得很多,但事实并非如此,还有许多值得你学习的事情,而你的员工能够给你许多启发。你对他们倾听得越多,你从他们那里得到的就越多。

记住这个黄金法则:你说得越多,你得到的就越少。你对员工越平易近人,他们就会越信任你,对你越诚实,给予你的支持就越多,而且会更加卖力地为你效力。

谁才适合当CEO?

对于那些第一次担任CEO的人而言,如果你只有在大公司工作的经验,那么,你正处于一个非常不利的位置,因为在大公司里,有一大支团队支持你,而这里有许多非常有经验的人,他们的能力能补足你的弱点。因此,你很容易认为自己非常能干,而事实上并非如此。

你一旦进入小公司或者一个初创公司,并且在这里担任CEO,你将不再有这些支持,你将面对自己从未意识到的所有弱点。在这种情况下,你需要找到一位贤明的顾问或良师益友,比如一位从小公司退休的CEO,他将帮助你解决这些问题。

如果你是一名博士或者曾经担任过专业分析师,你也处在一个非常不利的位置。因为在面对问题时,你往往希望通过谨慎的科学的研究来找到解决方法。但是从商业角度来看,一家小型企业没有时间、金钱或资源来做这些。你只能根据现有状况快速做出最佳决定。

如果你来自技术开发或产品开发领域,你需要找出如何能成为一名优秀销售人员的方法。通常产品开发和技术开发人员会瞧不起销售人员。他们不理解销售技巧和销售培训的重要性。通常情况下,他们内向,不喜欢与他人会面,也不善于销售和推广他们的产品。

没有销售经验的人也有机会成为CEO。在这

种情况下,我建议他们应该迅速参与一个销售培训课程。同时,你应该开始常常与销售人员通电话,这样可以获得更多有关该领域的经验。

如果你没有财务背景,这可能也是一个大问题,其实大多数第一次担任CEO的人都没有财务背景。这一点可以理解,但很快你会发现这是许多人都在意的一个领域,包括投资者、股东和董事会。

你需要学习如何看懂损益表和资产负债表,并且有能力去解释它们,因为通常情况下企业会粉饰它们的财务状况,使其看起来比实际情况更好。如果你来自销售、产品开发或市场营销领域,通常情况下你可能无法理解这些财务问题。

因此,你可以去参加一个财务课程(例如针对非财务管理者的会计课程),或者找一位有经验的审计师、会计师或者分析师来教你一些诀窍。

了解你自己

我并不是说如果有博士学位或者来自大公司的人就一定无法胜任CEO的职位。有许多成功的案例证明,这样的人也能够成为卓越的CEO。

你过去所学的一切都是有益的。但是,如果你开始真正地相信它,那么你将遇到麻烦。只有当你拥有敏锐的领导力能够辨识你所知道的是否正确,是否可能误导你的时候,你才能够进步。

敏锐的领导力在于能够理解领导力的实质是一种不断地忘却那些无用的并且不断地发现那些有用事物的能力,不论这些有用的人或事来自哪里。

你无法假设你所拥有的那些经验是否对你第一次担任CEO有利,然而最重要的在于,你有足够的自知之明知道自己的行为弱点是什么,当你坐上CEO这个位置的时候应该知道如何有建设性地去应对。

领导能力的表象与实质的真正区别不是学历、技术知识、销售技巧,或者在大公司抑或是小公司工作的经验。表象与实质的区别是对自己弱点的自我认知,以及当你需要时能够迅速地从精神上转变你的信仰的能力。

表象和实质的区别是向你周围所有人学习的能力,不论他们的职位、头衔、富裕程度和财力。

一旦你真正看透了这一切,你肯定能够成为一名成功的CEO,无论你是否是第一次担任。C

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"Style versus Substance in First-Time CEOs"

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Great Executive, Terrible CEO

Many years ago I was on the board of a technology company that had just been spun out of a government agency. We had to hire a CEO. We chose a man, who I will call Joe, who had had long experience as a senior executive in a large, American software company.

We were very pleased with our choice. Joe was strong in the area of sales, and sales were our major concern. He was experienced, confident and mature. He was also personable and charismatic. The staff rapidly fell in love with him. We felt that he was really the right man for the job and we waited for what we knew would be great results for the company.

At first things looked great. The sales pipeline exploded. He expanded the staff significantly, particularly in the sales area.

There were some disturbing signs though. He laid off some of the product development people to pay for salespeople. He himself had expensive tastes which showed up in his new office furniture and his entertainment expenses for prospects, not to mention first-class travel.

But he explained that this was necessary to expand sales and the board went along with him. After all, he had an impressive background in sales and a lot of experience in a major company. These were just the early costs that were necessary in order to achieve later success.

The success never came. The expenses went up enormously but sales actually declined. After a year we had to fire Joe and the company never recovered. In the end we were forced to sell it for nothing to a competitor.

We had chosen the wrong CEO. It turned out that, as a CEO, Joe was all style and no substance. He talked a good game. He had fooled us. Moreover he had fooled himself. He didn't know himself that he could not be a CEO.

But actually, Joe had been a really good executive. He had been very successful in sales. He had had a lot of executive experience. The trouble is, being a good or even a great executive doesn't mean that you will be a good, or even a mediocre CEO. Joe was a great executive and a hopeless CEO.

The First Time is the Worst Time

Style without substance is, unfortunately, a common problem amongst first-time CEOs. I have been the CEO of several companies. No-one teaches you how to be a CEO. The first time one goes into a CEO Job, you don't have any experience as a CEO. You can imagine what it will be like. You can tell yourself you have had a lot of experience in senior positions before you became a CEO. But the fact remains that you have never been a CEO before and you don't really know what it takes to be one.

There are a lot of temptations in being a CEO, even of a small company. People often accord you a lot of respect because of the title, even if you don't really deserve it. Your employees treat you differently. They laugh at your jokes, even when they're bad. They often don't tell you the truth because they think you might not want to hear it. Suppliers and vendors entertain you to get you as a client.

All of that can make a person vain and over-confident, even if they are not usually not like that. If they happen to be vain and over-confident before they get into the job, then they will get even worse.

What are the signals of a CEO who is going to fail due to problems in style? These are some of them:

- He likes to have expensive meals with people
- He has an expensive car
- He spends a lot on his own image, especially public relations
- He has a large office with expensive furniture
- He uses company money for personal expenses
- He doesn't like to be told the truth
- He criticizes employees in front of other employees
- He talks badly about particular employees to other employees when those employees are not present
- He doesn't allow his employees to disagree with him or he reacts badly to them having another opinion.
- He constantly tries to show his people that he knows more than they do
- He is not able to acknowledge to his people when he makes mistakes or is wrong about something.

Of course, there are many other signals. These are just a few of the more obvious ones. But if a CEO (first-time or otherwise) has one or more of these symptoms, he is basically showing that he favors style over substance. In this case a board needs to be concerned because it is likely that this person will fail as a CEO, even if he is making money. The failure will result because of one or more of the following reasons:

- His **employees** will not trust him, the good ones will leave, the bad ones will stay, and he will find it difficult to get new employees who are good; his product development and sales will suffer and his employees will not come up with new ideas to help the company
- His **investors** will not trust him because he is spending their money irresponsibly, often to make himself look better rather than to benefit the company; that means they won't invest more money and they will not get their friends to invest either, so the company may run out of money.
- The **board** will not trust him because they see employees and investors losing confidence in him; in addition they will see in their meetings with him that he favors style over substance, and they will not help him to make the company successful.

Training for the First-Time CEO

So here are a few lessons and tips for the new CEO of a relatively new company:

You don't see a person's true personality until they are in a position of power: a first-time CEO will not know in advance how he will respond to a situation where he has a lot of power. He might think he will act responsibly and with humility. Some people do, many people don't. If you don't act with humility in this position of power, you won't know about it in advance because most people who become a CEO for the first time assume they will act well.

If they don't act well as a CEO and they let the power go to their heads, they won't realize that is happening to them. They will just believe that they are acting responsibly and proactively, as any CEO should do.

Also when they act badly as a first-time CEO, their employees won't tell them about it, because they will be too scared to do that. So the new CEO will not know that he is acting stupidly and arrogantly.

Your employees see everything about you, even though you don't realize it: people are very perceptive. Your employees see you making decisions many times a day on many different issues so they rapidly get a very good sense of who you are, including your strengths and weaknesses. If they don't like you or see you making big mistakes they won't tell you, but will pretend to like you and they will make believe that you are making good decisions even when they know they are terrible.

If you can get your employees to trust you, they can be an invaluable source of great ideas and great advice. If they don't trust you, you will never receive the benefit of their support and so you will almost certainly fail. That is because running a good company is tough and you need all the support you can get.

Everything you do sends a signal about you and your expectations, even when you don't know you are sending these signals: One of the most disconcerting things about becoming a CEO for the first time is that people are watching your every move, you're every decision. They are even watching your body language, your facial expressions, your reactions and responses. That is because all of these things are sending signals to them about who you are, what you expect and how you are going to respond to them and their work.

Of course these things happen too when you are not a CEO. But as a CEO, your employees become ultra-interested in these things because now you have a lot of power over them – to fire them, help them, give them more salary, make them look better in front of other employees.

If you are a first-time CEO you are rarely aware of these things. You probably don't understand that even a minor decision or a minor act, even a small facial expression, is being closely watched and interpreted for what it means about you and your relationship with each one of your employees.

If you look slightly dissatisfied because of a small facial expression, this will be monitored and interpreted. If you didn't mean to do that, it's now too late because you have already sent the signal to your employees.

So as a first-time CEO you have to become very aware of things such as your facial expressions, your reactions and your body language as well as your overt decisions. That is because these will have a huge impact on how your employees respond to you in the future and whether or not they will trust and support you.

Your most powerful tool as a first-time CEO is to listen to your employees, no matter how junior they are: As a CEO you might think you know a lot but that isn't true. There is so much to learn and your employees have a lot of the answers. The more time you spend listening to them, the more power you will have with them.

Remember the Golden Rule: the more you talk the less power you will have. The more approachable you are to your employees, the more they will trust you and the more honest they will be with you, the more support they will give you and the harder they will work for you.

PhDs, Big Company Types, Please Don't Apply

Here are a few more tips for first-time CEOs:

If your experience is only with large companies you are at a huge disadvantage: that is because in large companies you are supported by large teams which contain people with skills you don't possess who compensate for your weaknesses. So it's easy to believe that you are much stronger than you actually are.

Once you get into a smaller company or a startup, particularly as a CEO, you won't have any of this support and for the first time you will be confronted with weaknesses you never realized that you had. In this case you really need to find a mentor, say a retired CEO of a smaller company, who can help you address these issues.

If you have a PhD or someone who been a professional researcher you are also at a huge disadvantage. This is because you tend to see any problem as needing careful scientific research in order to find a solution. But of course in business, especially in smaller companies, there is never any time, money or resources to do this and you just have to make a fast decision that can be the best decision under the circumstances.

As a professional researcher you will find this to be uncomfortable or disconcerting. Unless you figure out how to cure yourself of your addiction to careful research you will quickly fail. Again a mentor who has already been a CEO can be helpful.

If you come from a technical or product development background, you are going to need to figure out how to become good at sales: Often product development and technical people look down on sales and salespeople. They often don't understand the importance of sales, sales skills and sales training. Often they are introverted and don't like meeting with people, or selling or promoting their products.

It's possible to get to a CEO position without ever having had anything to do with sales. In this case my advice is to rapidly get into a sales training course. Also you should start going regularly on sales call with your salespeople to get more experience in this area.

If you don't come from a financial background that can be a major problem too: Most first-time CEOs don't have a financial background. That's understandable but soon you will discover that that is all that many people care about, including investors, shareholders and boards.

You will have to learn how to read income statements and balance sheets and to be able to interpret them because frequently companies massage their financials to look better than they really are. If you come from backgrounds such as sales, product development or marketing you usually won't understand any of this.

So either do a financial course (e.g. accounting for nonfinancial managers), or gets a good mentor and guide such as an experienced auditor, accountant or analyst who can teach you some of the tricks – of which there are very many.

Know Yourself

Of course, we don't really mean it when we say that if you have a PhD or come from a big company, you will fail as a CEO. There are plenty of examples of such people who have turned out to be excellent CEOs. But what we really mean is this.

Whatever you have learned in the past is good. But if you start to actually believe it, then you will get into trouble. It's only when you have the mental and leadership agility to recognize that what you know might be wrong or misleading that you will be able to move ahead.

True leadership agility lies in understanding that the true substance of leadership is the ability to constantly unlearn what is not useful and to constantly look around to see what is useful, no matter where you get it from.

The same thing applies to experience. You can't assume any experience you have, whether it is from a large or even a small company or startup is going to be relevant to you as a first-time CEO. Rather, what is most important is having enough self-awareness to understand what your behavioral vulnerabilities are, and how to address them constructively while you are in the CEO position.

The true difference between style and substance in leadership is not educational qualifications, technical knowledge or sales skills, background in a large or indeed a small company. The difference between style and substance is having self-awareness of your weaknesses, and the mental agility to change your beliefs quickly when you need to.

The difference between style and substance is the ability to learn from everyone around you, no matter what their position, title, or level of money and resources.

Once you have figured all that out, you can be sure that you will be a great first-time, or indeed an any-time, CEO.

Dr. E. Ted Prince, the Founder and CEO of the Perth Leadership Institute, located in Florida in the US has also been CEO of several other companies, both public and private. He is the author of 'The Three Financial Styles of Very Successful Leaders' (McGraw-Hill, 2005) and numerous other publications in this area. He is a frequent speaker at industry conferences. He works with large corporations globally on leadership development programs and coaches senior executives and teams in the area of financial leadership. He has held the position of Visiting Professor at the University of Florida in the US in its Graduate Business School and also at the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics in China.