

Assemble a management team one investment at a time



Jerry Merola

*Model your
business after
these successful
examples and
see productivity
increase, along with
your bottom line.*

Many times, when a company is performing well, the news media has a tendency to link such success with the individuals at the helm, those trusty CEOs and COOs that seem to have vision beyond the rest of the pack.

Many have become household names, like Steve Jobs, the “iCEO” of Apple Computer, or “Apple” as we think of the company today. Or Alan Mulally, the ex-Boeing CEO turned Ford Motor Co. Renaissance man.

The interesting thing about these two examples is that each of these unrelated companies faltered without solid leadership. When Jobs left his post at Apple in 1985, the company began to get a bit wayward, searching for a market niche that it could grab hold of.

It wasn't until 1996 that Jobs returned to his “baby,” the seemingly unstoppable iPod, iPhone, iPad conqueror of the western world. If I had to sum up Jobs' management acumen in one sentence it would be, “the man has the vision to think out of the box almost exclusively.”

The Ford tale is a bit different. Mulally was already a highly decorated CEO at Boeing Commercial Airplanes, a segment of Boeing. His success within that organization was well documented, leading the Ford family to believe that he would be the right man to pull the ailing automobile manufacturer out of the doldrums during the middle part of this past decade.

But while Mulally certainly has vision, his success at Ford seems to revolve around his ability to develop solid, sustainable strategies. After all, he was the man who pushed the company to leverage its assets during the heyday era of 2006-2007.

That forethought proved to save the day when the recession hit North America, as Ford was the only domestic brand standing with cash in the bank and the power to use it. If asked to sum up Mulally's performance to date, I'd peg him as “an individual with the tools and the tenure to cut through the red tape and launch the safety boat in time.”

IT'S A TOP DOWN THING

When it comes to success, one individual certainly can't do it all. Whether it's Apple or Ford, the thousands of engineers, planners, designers, and strategists are truly the ones that breed success.

They require, however, a leader that knows how to pull the most pertinent knowledge and creativity from deep within them and use it to propel the organization forward. Skill, drive, and capability are everything in business today, as a company is only as good as the foundation of employees it rests upon.

Hiring talent is one thing, using it is another. Remember the Sony Walkman? Clearly it was the predecessor to the all-encompassing iPod. But why wasn't there a Sony iPod? And why have the iPhone and iPad proven to be so successful? The reason, as I see it, is that Apple's management team allowed its technical designers to break free of societal norms, tried and true formats, in search of something revolutionary.

The result? Devices that think like humans think. When was the last time you said that about your Windows PC?

When Mulally arrived at Ford, one of his first missions was creating a “think tank” using individuals with



expertise and a clear sense of mission. Ford was now building cars that today's consumer actually wanted to buy, and doing so at quality levels far above most of the competition.

The gang at the (old) General Motors said it simply couldn't be done; cheap foreign labor and relaxation of import tariffs would put the final nails in the coffin. Think about that one. Fifty years ago, General Motors owned the auto industry. Its share of the market was so dominant that it seemed unconscionable that any foreign make could ever compete.

Resting on their laurels, executive management coasted along, all the while taking their hands off the wheel, one painful year at a time. Mid-level executives stopped looking for "cutting edge" and simply settled for cutting corners. Poor manufacturing practices, bad investment decisions, and the squandering of billions of dollars can all be blamed on management's short-sightedness and "get-rich-quick" business strategies.

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH THE BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST

As the old saying goes, "Two minds are better than one." It should come as no surprise that concepts and planning are often refined and maximized when the skill sets of multiple professionals are taken into account. Oftentimes an entertainment operator will ask me the best way to perform a specific function within his or her facility.

While I'm happy to take a stab at a solution, the most effective strategy will likely come from those already on the front line: the key staff members that are navigating the process day-in and day-out. Soliciting input and suggestions from staff is a key element in being a good leader.

Do you think Alan Mulally lead the technical team in the design of the Ford Sync entertainment and communications system? Did Steve Jobs figure out how to get all that music into one tiny little device? The fact is some of

the best ideas come from those in the trenches.

As I understand the story, when Jobs returned to Apple, he visited a long forgotten "skunk works" department that had neither the authority nor budget to promote its newly conceived devices.



"The fact is some of the best ideas come from those in the trenches."

Imagine how many more "skunk works" exist out there, buried in the annals of some companies, never to see the light of day. Fresh ideas and innovative methods rarely come from the top. However, it is the responsibility of that upper hierarchy to incubate those concepts and use them to establish a way forward.

To a savvy CEO, employees represent more than just a payroll expense. Each and every hour that an employee works within an organization represents an opportunity to capture knowledge and opinion. Think your business

can perform better? Why not use the resources that already exist around you to find out how.

EMPOWER STAFF TO EXCEL BEYOND EXPECTATIONS

Sometimes it's easy to assume that all employees are simply motivated by money, a steady paycheck, if you will. While this is certainly true in some cases, an empowered employee enjoys a greater sense of worth, and with such responsibility comes job satisfaction.

When job satisfaction levels are high, employees tend to be more creative, and most importantly, more responsible within their surroundings. They value their job, their company, and their future. They routinely feel that they're part of the solution, and tend to take on greater responsibility to insure a company's success.

To empower an employee, management must be willing to delegate duties, trust in the capabilities of staff, and fairly reward those who excel. It's a simple process really. Success breeds success more times than not.

As we begin to pull out of a long, drawn out recession here in the U.S., it would appear that the time is ripe to build excellence into every business plan, from the top down. While the "how to" manual on the perfect management style hasn't been created yet, there are enough examples out there for each of us to follow. As for me, I'll be waiting for the iHuman household robot and fuel-less automobile from the best and the brightest. ▲

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