LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP

CHANGING TIMES: THE NEW VIEW FROM THE CORNER OFFICE

(PARTNER) DR. STEVEN J. STEIN, FOUNDER AND CEO, MULTI-HEALTH SYSTEMS INC.

Presenter
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Facilitator
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“Meet the new boss, Same as the old boss” sang The Who in their iconic song “Won’t Get Fooled Again” more than 40 years ago.

But times have changed.

To succeed as a leader in business today, the new boss must be radically different from his or her predecessors. The workplace culture has changed, demanding a new leadership style and a different set of skills. Clinical psychologist Dr. Steven J. Stein led a lively workshop that explored the new leadership landscape.

Stein’s professional advice is grounded in practical experience. He is the founder and CEO of Multi-Health Systems Inc. (MHS), and an internationally recognized expert in workplace leadership. “News reports keep saying that there is a dearth of leadership in Canada,” said Stein. “I am concerned about that, as a psychologist and as a CEO. So I have another purpose here: to learn from you and to help you share your leadership experience and expertise.”

LEADERS CAN TRANSFORM THEMSELVES

Stein noted that the notion and practice of leadership continually evolves. Entrepreneurial leaders are different from stabilizing leaders. Successful leaders can transform themselves as the organization changes. Leaders who don’t have this ability will face difficulty.

“It is hard to be a leader without the ability to change with the organization,” he said. “Yet we often promote people to management because they are good at a technical skill. We take an engineer and say, ‘You are a manager now,’ but these are completely different skills. He may be a great engineer, but he may not necessarily be good at managing people. Therefore, technical or professional skills are not always the best reason to promote people. Managing people is tough.”

Not surprisingly, the audience strongly agreed with this statement. The CEO of a mid-sized manufacturing company laid the blame for his company’s management issues at his own feet. “The biggest challenge I face is me,” he said. “I have no training in managing people.”

Another manufacturer told the group how he had convinced his three sons to join him in building the family business, which is located in a rural area. Management training was the key in his case. “I know that I am only in the people business, and I wanted my sons to stay with the company,” he said. “When the eldest was 32, I made him president, and he was a little leery of it. I went outside the company and got trainers, and we still bring in trainers five or six times a year, on attitude and communication and development. We spend a lot of money on training of various kinds. We have never seen our people more engaged. When people understand the culture, it improves their performance.”
Another CEO strongly disagreed. “I think training is a waste of time,” he said. “We have brought in trainers several times. People are all gung ho at the beginning, and some changes have even lasted a year, but they all eventually revert to the way they were.”

TRAINING MUST BE NURTURED

A quick poll of the group revealed that about 60 per cent of the leaders were spending a “significant” amount of money on training for their people. Most agreed that training is something that must be nurtured and sustained by leadership. Middle management must feel responsible for change, and this can involve significant risk to the company.

One company leader told the group that by spending time as part of a project team, he boosted the effectiveness of his training program. “We went through a very difficult computer implementation process recently,” he said. “I learned that you really have to coach and coax some people. You have to be strategic and add coaches to the process, so the new hires can see their future in the company as well. I spend a lot of time with the teams, two or three hours a week. They need training, they need to know the values, and they need to have ‘skin in the game.’ It has to be a win-win situation.”

Most participants agreed that training is only useful for motivated, engaged staff. “No matter what you do with training, its success is still ultimately determined by the people you hire,” said the CEO of a manufacturing equipment company. “Who you hire is very important. After 35 years, we have come to the conclusion that you can’t change a personality. You have to hire the right person. You have to hire for attitude.”

CREATIVE HIRING

The CEO of a hardware manufacturer serving the utilities sector offered an interesting solution to the challenge of identifying and hiring the best possible employees. He went directly to the source. “To meet the best people and get to know them, I took part-time teaching jobs in engineering programs at a college and university,” he said. “Why? Because there are students there who have a five-year degree or diploma and practical experience. It gives you a good selection of people. Now I am hiring some of them at my own company, and it is working out very well. When I hire someone, I have to be able to see their future with my company.”

Stein pointed out that this same approach is used at some very successful companies. “It is a hallmark of Google and probably one of the keys to its success,” he said. “When it hires programmers, it is also looking at management skills. Google told me that it is always looking for management skills in new hires because in six months those people will be managing others.”

Participants gained insight into the challenges facing leaders today.

MOTIVATING THE MILLENNIALS

Stein moved the discussion along from effective hiring practices to the crucial task of motivating the newest generation of workers and emerging leaders. The “millennials,” usually defined as people born between 1980 and 1995, are the fastest-growing component of Canada’s workforce, at about seven million people. Their attitudes, values and motivators are vastly different from those of previous generations.

“Theyir demands are different and their expectations are different,” said Stein. “As leaders, we have to learn how to accommodate this change, and if we don’t, we will be missing out. I think a lot of us are going to have to take a close look at all aspects
and quirks of the millennials. Their motivation is different. Another reality is that they are more likely to leave for another job, so we might be hesitant to invest in training them. However, if we don’t offer training, we are not going to get good people. It is a risk we have to take."

Summing up the session, Stein noted that leaders also have to consider themselves as workers; to maintain effective performance, they must maintain a good work/life balance.

“We need periodic breaks during the work day to recharge, whether it is through meditation or mindfulness or whatever works for you,” he said. “Good leaders have to remember to take care of themselves, too.”

SELF-ASSESSING YOUR LEADERSHIP PERFORMANCE
What does it take to be a great business leader today? Taking a short leadership quiz developed by Dr. Stein will help to make you aware of how your emotional intelligence directly affects your leadership qualities. It looks at the “The Four Pillars of Leadership” all related to emotional intelligence. Emotionally intelligent leaders who embody such traits as great interpersonal skills, high stress management, adaptability, empathy and problem solving skills, are more successful and garner more revenue in their companies than leaders who lack these skills. It is not a scientific test, but rather a short assessment to draw your attention to important qualities of successful leaders.

The quiz is available as part of Report 21 in the ministry’s Leading Growth Firm (LGF) Series. Click on the image to access the full report and quiz.

LGF REPORT 21:
THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF LEADERSHIP

"THE FOUR PILLARS OF LEADERSHIP"

Dr. Steven J. Stein concluded the session with a summary of what he considers to be the “four pillars” of leadership, based on 20 years of research on emotional intelligence and performance conducted by the MHS team.

1 AUTHENTICITY
A leader must be a trusted role model who inspires moral behaviour and confidence.

2 COACHING
A leader must help train and inspire others and be a mentor.

3 INSIGHT
A leader should communicate with a purpose and offer hope and inspiration.

4 INNOVATION
A leader should recognize the importance of risk taking and let staff complete projects that fail.