



Winter 2001

Success Strategies

Tips for Leadership and Organizational Transformation

Selecting a CEO: What Boards Must Do

Selecting a CEO is the most important function of every Board of Directors. To see the key considerations that should guide a Board's CEO search and selection process, visit www.wbwassociates.com (go to "The CEO" section under Articles, Presentations and Solutions).

Give Us Your Thoughts

Our newsletter topics come directly from recent client experience, and we'd be glad to hear your point of view. If there is a subject you'd like us to address, or a point you would like to make, please let us know via email:

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Coaching Tip: Good listening is not always natural *"What did you say? I heard you, but I'm afraid I wasn't listening."*

The ability to listen well is taken for granted, notes Warner B. Wims, Ph.D., President of WBW & Associates. However, effective listening is not always the natural thing to do. Lack of good listening is pervasive, wasteful, and even damaging. Good listening saves time and money, and leads to effective problem-solving and greater trust.

Here are some suggestions for improved listening and responding:

- Focus. If you are distracted by a previous conversation, problems at home, or something else, you are simply not at your best as a listener.
- Avoid thinking only about what you will say once the speaker gives you an opening. Listen in order to value and understand what is being said, rather than to set up your own point of view.
- Relax. Take a moment to process what you've heard before communicating your reaction. (Remember that effective listening is not always the natural thing to do.)
- Summarize what you think you heard as a check for accuracy.
- Listen "beneath the words" for what the person is implicitly saying. For example, perhaps John is really saying "this is difficult for me," or "I want reassurance," while he's talking about a budget issue. In other words, listen for real needs. Notice nonverbal cues. Then test your assumptions through inquiry.
- Draw out. Some people are not comfortable being direct. Encourage them by being patient and by asking for clarification.
- Be active and stay engaged. Listen to anticipate where the speaker's points are leading. Consider the evidence for and against the main points. Mentally summarize the central idea and supporting issues.
- Ask questions. For example, ask customers what they want and ask colleagues and staff what they need and think.
- Recognize your emotional response to what is being said (e.g., anger, defensiveness) and be sure that your response is not prejudging or blurring the real issue at stake. In other words, listen to yourself— both your thoughts and your feelings.
- Acknowledge your prejudices. If you already feel committed to a course of action or have strong feelings about what should be, acknowledge these leanings. Summon the courage to hear alternative views and countervailing evidence, then reserve judgment until the alternative views have been fully aired.
- Create opportunities for people to listen to each other. This may require creating the time and place, and identifying ground rules that will increase the odds that people will truly listen to each other (see www.wbwassociates.com under Articles for sample ground rules).
- Be concise. Begin by stating your main point with as few words as possible. Then follow up with elaboration.

OVER

Coaching Tip: Help—I don't have enough time!

Most professionals complain that they simply do not have enough time to get things done. Use this checklist to make note of what you can do differently—in both your professional and personal life—to give yourself more time. Remember that even small timesaving behaviors can add up quickly.

Areas of Focus and Review	Opportunities
Delegation: Are you delegating as much as possible to others?	
Conciseness: Are you too longwinded, spending more time talking than necessary?	
Cutting off the source: Can the source of the work be changed to reduce the load?	
Technology: Can you use email, voicemail, computers, and/or personal assistant devices more effectively?	
Self-organization: Can you improve how you file, find, and schedule things?	
Time allocation: Are you overbooking your time? Do you leave enough leeway for the inevitable “fire?” Should you schedule some time during which you are not to be interrupted?	
Work organization: Can you reorganize the team (change who does what, adjust who reports to you and how often) for more efficiency?	
Preparation and Planning: Are you planning ahead each day, week, and month to operate more efficiently? Are you starting from scratch instead of developing a template (e.g., packing for travel from scratch rather than having travel-ready provisions)?	
Analysis: Have you analyzed how you spend your time in order to see and then adjust how it is being used?	
Prioritizing: Are you tackling the highest priority first?	
Expectations: Are your expectations of yourself and others realistic?	
Communication: Are you copied on emails, memos, and phone messages on a “need to know” basis? Can you reduce their number? Before you respond, are you clear about the points you want to make? Are there alternative ways to communicate that take less time?	
Meetings: Do you schedule and attend the correct number of meetings? Do you plan and stick to the agenda and time allotted? Are you concise and do you require others to be concise?	
Listening: Do you lose time because you did not listen well in the first place? (see Listening article on reverse side of newsletter)	
Saying “No”: Do you need to turn down more, and brave any negative reactions that result?	
Changing the System: Can you change the system at its core? (e.g., change the authority structure, increase skill levels, reduce external demands, etc.)	

How Should a Board Select a CEO?

Selecting a CEO is the most important responsibility of a Board of Directors. Based on our experience working with clients of many kinds, here are the key considerations that should guide a CEO search:

- The primary objective should be to conduct a thoughtful and objective process that gives candidates and Board members a fair and full opportunity for review.
- The focus on the process should be the future competency requirements of the position (see the Organization Assessment section of Articles and Presentations for an explanation of competencies). Therefore, the Board must work at gaining a common understanding of the organization's future requirements.
- Before expected competency requirements are identified and candidates are considered, the Board needs to consider and reach consensus upon issues such as:
 1. What are alternative scenarios regarding the future business climate and basis for market competitiveness?
 2. What is the anticipated future business strategy?
 3. What are alternative ways of reorganizing that might influence what is expected of the CEO position?
- Agreeing on required competencies and reaching consensus on key issues is crucial to gaining a common understanding among board members – don't assume it will happen! – so that when actual candidates are considered, Board members can be consistent in their assessment.
- The competencies that are developed should serve as the basis for the Board's interview questions and for any diagnostic instruments (such as 360° assessments) used to help evaluate internal candidates.
- The process should be instituted as far in advance as possible. Two years in advance of the need-to-hire date is an ideal timeframe. A long lead time is especially important if there are internal candidates who may need time to demonstrate their readiness to the Board. This may also represent the minimum time needed to prepare backups for internal candidates who may be chosen, or to prepare for the impact on individuals not chosen (e.g., if a contender not chosen for the CEO position decides to leave the organization).
- The respective roles in the selection process, including the Board's responsibility and the current CEO's responsibility, should be made clear (see box).

Succession Process Roles

Board of Directors

- Identifies competency requirements of future CEO
- Gains exposure to candidates
- Reviews progress reports
- Interviews candidates
- Makes final selection decision

Current CEO

- Offers views on competency requirements and candidates
- Provides Board with opportunity for exposure to candidates
- Coaches and provides developmental opportunities for internal candidates
- Delivers progress reports
- Provides succession recommendations
- Communicates process and progress to the organization as appropriate
- Seeks constructive relationships with candidates not chosen
- Assists selected candidate with transition and (if internal) succession consequences further down in organization

Candidates

- Participate in competency and diagnostic interviews
- Facilitate their own diagnostic review (e.g., for internal candidates: 360° feedback, management style, organizational climate, etc.)
- Develop skills in needed areas, under CEO guidance
- Perform special assignments and deliver board presentations
- Prepare for formal Board interview