



## CLG EXECUTIVE ADVISORS

# LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT LEADERSHIP

Mark Kutner



As a young manager, rising quickly to positions of greater responsibility in a Fortune 100 technology company, my formula for success was to be “in charge”. What I assumed was managerial DNA drove me to be more knowledgeable and to have all the answers. I lived in “tell” mode, directing people and events. My need to be involved in everything sometimes created more of a hindrance than help. Meetings I ran or attended ran late, and I consistently kept people waiting to see me.

On the surface, this management style seemed to work for me and my team. It wasn't until our organization acquired another that I realized the error of my ways. The merger created two conflicting and divergent cultures, with the existing top-down, command and control culture reigning supreme. Blind compliance was pervasive and risk taking was non-existent. I was now responsible for a division with revenues in excess of \$4 billion. Of my 7,500 employees, approximately 1,500 were management and the majority of non-management employees were union members. My direct reports were senior managers responsible for large functions. In order to succeed, they all had to work together, interdependently, aligned toward the same goals. With an organization of the size and cultural malaise that existed, it became clear to me that I couldn't manage in the same old way and be successful. This was my call to action, my opportunity to destroy the existing authoritarian culture. If I was going to create an outstanding business unit with a high performing team achieving extraordinary results, something had to change.

In order to become a visionary leader, one who empowered people to take risks, and promoted commitment to a common goal, I needed to reinvent myself. First, I recognized that my senior team needed to share a vision of organizational goals, priorities, and objectives. Each functional head needed to know what interdependencies he/she had with the others and how

that symbiosis served broader organizational goals. Second, the vision then had to be communicated to employees at all levels, so they could see their role in the bigger organizational picture. It was incumbent upon each manager, most importantly me and my senior team, to continually communicate those goals, priorities, and strategies to all. Third, my behavior needed to change. I needed to trust my leaders and employees and empower them to achieve the results they were committed to. The more we, as leaders, are removed from the front line employees, the less we know how work should be done. The employees closest to the customer are the subject matter experts, and they must be given the freedom and encouragement to determine the best methods for achieving their objectives. Fourth, changing my behavior meant that I had to let go of trying to manage everything, and allow my managers and employees to take on more responsibility. Less meant more. I began to meet with more groups throughout the organization. Instead of demonstrating my knowledge, I tried to learn. Instead of controlling, I encouraged creativity and risk taking. I became a far better listener and stopped trying to have all of the answers all of the time. Meetings started and ended on schedule, showing people that I respected their time, and I began to focus on outcomes as opposed to activities. As I transitioned from one who manages to one who leads, my senior team adopted these same values and behaviors.

Just as the caterpillar does not emerge from the cocoon overnight, this transition was anything but quick. But, after 18 months, my leadership transformation yielded outcomes that were hard to miss. Our organization was comprised of energized, committed, and passionate employees. Leaders throughout the organization encouraged employees and supported them in improving processes and performance. Positive feedback on employee behaviors became commonplace. My senior team worked together to resolve every obstacle or conflict. Front line employees worked together as teams, and committed to improving processes and servicing customers. There was less stress throughout the organization, and there was strong focus on the business's goals and objectives.

The results were striking. Sales increased incrementally, and sales per rep or salesperson were up greater than 15%, in spite of continual reductions in force. We set breakthrough objectives in revenue growth, customer

satisfaction, and employee morale. Customer satisfaction survey results improved from 70-75% "very good" and "outstanding" ratings to 85-90%. By focusing on the customer throughout the organization, employees found ways to improve and streamline processes, and customer affecting mistakes were nearly eradicated. Employees at all levels took risks to improve the business without fear of reprisal. Employee morale surveys indicated we were making a difference. They rated our organization as a great place to work, and more importantly, they universally understood the goals and strategies of the business unit, and their role in achieving those goals.

In reflecting on my transformation from manager to leader, I am most proud of witnessing employees at all levels in the organization taking on new challenges with energy, enthusiasm, and commitment. A renewed attitude of optimism, possibility, and accomplishment emanated throughout the organization, and it all stemmed from the vision and behaviors of its leaders.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Mark Kutner has dedicated over 40 years to leading change in global organizations during post-merger integrations and cultural transformations. This experience, combined with his previous executive leadership roles at Bell Atlantic, IBM, and GTE Corporation, provide him with the first-hand knowledge and incisive perspective to quickly perceive an organization's unspoken agendas, problems, and solutions. As a CLG Executive Advisor, Mark is direct yet compassionate when supporting leaders in being clear, committed, and confident in facing difficult decisions. He is also a valued partner and sounding board when advising incoming and sitting CEOs and executives on enhancing leadership performance, aligning the organization, and achieving operational excellence. Mark earned his degree in Business Administration from Boston University.*

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#### ABOUT EXECUTIVE ADVISORS

All CLG Executive Advisors are recently retired corporate C-suite executives from some of the world's largest and most successful companies. They are dedicating this season of their lives to helping other leaders lead more effectively. They work solely with C-suite executives, Boards, and succession candidates. The focus of their work encompasses issues such as leadership, strategy execution, succession, new leader transition, change implementation, and teamwork among senior teams.

#### ABOUT CLG

Founded in 1993, CLG is headquartered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and fields 160 consultants worldwide, helping "transform strategy into actions that produce measurable results." This is CLG's mission.

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