

Henry S. Givray of SmithBucklin: Five Things You Need To Be A Highly Effective Leader During Turbulent Times



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Replenish your energy — Time is finite. We all have exactly 24 hours in a day. We can't alter, manipulate or recover time. But energy can be expanded and regularly renewed. Therefore, rather than fret over time, we should instead concentrate on energy. When, where or under what circumstances do you personally get replenished or refreshed? The key is to know the type of energy you need, whether it is physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, or a combination thereof. Then identify your sources of needed energy which could be a place of beauty and serenity, physical exercise, quiet moments of reflection, a type of music, joyous memories, family time, conversation with a special someone, or a specific set of activities. Most importantly, tap into your sources of energy with discipline and relentless commitment not only when needed but also in preparation of what is ahead.

As part of my series about the “Five Things You Need To Be A Highly Effective Leader During Turbulent Times”, I had the pleasure of interviewing Henry S. Givray.

Henry S. Givray is the current Chairman and former President & CEO of SmithBucklin Corporation, an association management and services company. During Henry’s 13 years as CEO between 2002 and 2015, SmithBucklin achieved unprecedented success since its founding in 1949, including client satisfaction and retention, employee engagement, company growth, and financial performance.

Henry is a dedicated, ongoing student of leadership, committed to speaking and writing as a way to teach and give back. His insights and ideas on leadership have been prominently featured in business books and national news media. One of Henry’s most enduring achievements has been his creation of comprehensive, high-impact leadership learning programs. The programming has evolved to include two offerings. The SmithBucklin Leadership Institute is for board members of SmithBucklin client associations. Leadership’s Calling® is for C-level executives, business owners, managers at all levels, high-potentials, and individual practitioners from all types and sizes of organizations.

Two companies Henry served as CEO faced three high-stakes external crises — the dot-com crash, 9/11 and the 2008/2009 Great Recession. Henry confronted and successfully navigated these crises while delivering his best for his colleagues, clients, boards and shareholders by consciously applying and continuously honing certain practices underlying key principles drawn from his many years of continuous leadership learning and personal growth.

Thank you so much for your time! I know that you are a very busy person. Our readers would love to “get to know you” a bit better. Can you tell us a bit about your ‘backstory’ and how you got started?

My mother was an accomplished pianist and teacher; my dad a multi-talented and skilled portrait photographer. Both were artists and individual contributors. As a result, I did not grow-up in an environment where business or management topics and issues were ever raised or discussed. Nevertheless, as I reflect upon my life story, I have always been intensely interested in and fascinated with the principles, behaviors and practices of what I refer to *true* leadership and effective management.

In high school and through my junior year in college, I played bass guitar in a rock band. Interestingly, this offered me opportunities to consider and exercise leadership and management behaviors and actions. I was the one who booked gigs, dealt with agents, and kept the band together during the inevitable episodes of bickering, disagreements and squabbles between and among band members. At Cornell University, I served as resident advisor during my junior, senior and graduate years. This not only helped pay my housing costs, it also offered me the experience of being responsible for others and learning how to make things happen through influence versus authority; after all we were all just college students. I was also involved in the Greek system, pledging and becoming a “brother” in Chi Psi fraternity. In my senior year I ran and was elected president of the Interfraternity Council (IFC) , the governing body of the 47 Cornell fraternities. This was a big deal as the fraternity system represented more than 45% of the Cornell male student population. Serving as IFC President offered me a rich and comprehensive set of opportunities to develop my skills and test my talents in management, politics, communication, negotiations, operations and relationship building.

When I was 28, two years after joining the marketing division of a data services and modeling consulting company, I was promoted to consultant manager and assistant branch manager. The promotion ended up being a crucial point in my career as it was my first experience in management. I quickly became fascinated about the requirements, challenges and impact of business management. I instantly knew this is where I wanted my career to be. Over time, however, I began to doubt whether I had what it takes to become a senior executive. What I observed from company executives was an intense and almost obsessive focus on “the numbers” — i.e. what I believed to be more short-term quantitative measures such as quarterly and annual sales figures, number of customers, branch profitability ratios, sales quotas and market share. Though I understood and was exceedingly comfortable with the quantitative nature of business, I also found myself thinking more about and focusing my attention around the human element — qualitative aspects of what I thought it took for a company to be successful beyond any one year. Though at the time I couldn’t fully articulate, what I was essentially pondering and thinking about was culture — the values and principles that guide decisions and interactions between colleagues and with customers.

A few months after turning 30, I joined SmithBucklin Corporation, the world's largest association management and services company. After 13 years of rapid personal growth, increasing executive management responsibility and a strong track-record of success, I decided to leave SmithBucklin and join a start-up offering IT research and analysis founded by an industry icon. I was the president & COO. My tenure there lasted only 18 months. I realized that I am not well-suited for the COO role. My passion, beliefs and principles surrounding culture, strategy, management, and leadership principles and practices are strongly held and deeply embedded for me to be anything other than the CEO. After all the CEO position requires the holder to make decisions and judgment calls around culture, strategy, people, management, finances, markets and operations, and, ultimately be held accountable for a company's performance and long-term success.

After nearly five years as CEO for another start-up company during the 1990s and early 2000 "dot-com" period, I returned to SmithBucklin as its CEO in August 2002. At the end of 2015, I relinquished my CEO role though I continue to serve as Chairman of the Board in a non-executive capacity. Given my age and energy combined with my love and passion for all that is SmithBucklin, I could have continued for many years. In my estimation, however, unless there are extraordinary or mitigating circumstances, 10 to 15 years is about as long as any CEO tenure should be no matter how talented and impactful that CEO may be.

Today I focus my time, energy and heart on my body of work around leadership principles and practice in order to help grow leaders. I accomplish this in a formal way through my two leadership learning programs, Leadership's Calling and The SmithBucklin Leadership Institute, and informally through my one-on-one discussions and consultations with past graduates and current students as well as with others within my network.

Can you share a story about the funniest mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lessons or 'take aways' you learned from that?

Between 1998 and 2002, I served as CEO of a dot-com start-up company. The company was well-positioned to make a run at an initial public offering (IPO) . Unfortunately, the internet bubble officially burst in April 2000 and access to the public markets collapsed. In August 2001, I led the negotiations to sell the company to a well-established industry giant whose CEO I had recruited in 1999 to serve on our board of directors. It was an intense, grueling process. I would communicate often to my board offering status

updates and to review issues. I recall one time after a difficult and a bit testy phone call with the acquiring company CEO, I sent an email to my board members providing information, details and considerations — the good, the bad and the ugly. I used a board distribution list that I had previously created but I forgot to remove the acquiring company CEO from the list! He “replied all” and offered a few sarcastic yet witty and good-natured comments. It was actually kind of funny how he handled it. He and I had established a strong relationship so my comments were taken in stride. Nevertheless, I learned to be extra careful and judicious when preparing the recipient list for an email that includes confidential, sensitive or possibly delicate information and opinion. I also observed and was impressed with how the acquiring company CEO handled the situation with humor and grace.

None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story?

Whatever success and accomplishments I’ve achieved over the years have come about not only through my own talents, growth, hard work and perseverance but also through the assistance and encouragement of countless other people, in both professional and personal contexts. One person stands out and that’s my mom. She gave me what I believe to be the greatest gift any parent can give a child — that of self-esteem. My mom cultivated a loving home environment where freedom to be self-expressive was readily given to me even when I was quite young. This allowed me to explore, develop and test my thoughts, talents and boundaries. From early childhood on, my mom consistently celebrated, rejoiced and cheered even the smallest of my achievements. In this way she developed and nurtured in me a strong sense of self. However, even though my mom always encouraged the positive, she never falsely built me up by inventing or exaggerating achievements. Over the years, I’ve come to understand that a strong sense of self is actually self-confidence combined with self-knowledge.

Another story relates to my bout with cancer at age 14. Doctors gave me little chance of surviving past nine months. My dad and brother were overcome with grief barely containing their despair; they would often cry in front of me. But my mom, always smiling and in good cheer, would continually reference the future. Seeing my mom ‘up’ bolstered my spirits and gave me hope and strength. Without a doubt, my mom’s abiding optimism had a profound impact on my recovery.

Years later, I learned that late at night she would go somewhere in the house with a picture of her mother and break down and weep uncontrollably. I remain in awe of my mom's fortitude, emotional resilience and selflessness and how she conquered her own emotional pain and anguish in order to be fully present for me.

Extensive research suggests that “purpose driven businesses” are more successful in many areas. When your company started, what was its vision, what was its purpose?

SmithBucklin was founded some 70 years ago (known as Smith, Bucklin & Associates until 2003) and enjoyed significant growth during the 1908s and 1990s to become the dominant player in the association management industry. When I returned to SmithBucklin in August 2002 as its CEO, I knew we were in turnaround mode; the company was losing clients at an alarming rate, overall employee morale was low, overhead expenses had ballooned, productivity had fallen from previous years, and operating margins were at unacceptable levels. As the new CEO, I knew a successful turnaround required focus and attention to communicating and engaging employees, establishing my management team, connecting with and retaining clients, closing new business, managing key financial performance metrics, and reaching out to the association community. But what surprised and even concerned board members and even some on my team was my passionate commitment and devotion of time and energy to articulating and nurturing the SmithBucklin culture. For me, however, it was an easy and obvious decision as I have come to know that articulating, nurturing and preserving an authentic culture that guides and inspires is a foundational requirement for building a great, enduring company. Moreover, strong and passionate dedication to such efforts must start at the top.

The SmithBucklin Culture embodies three components: Vision — what the company strives to be; Mission — the purpose behind what the company does and its primary reason for being; and, Chosen Values — the company's principles, beliefs, ideals and standards for which it is not willing to compromise for financial gain or short-term expediency.

SmithBucklin's Vision is to be the most trusted and sought-after solution for association management and professional services based on a distinguished and stellar reputation for doing great and important work for client organizations. The SmithBucklin Mission is to achieve the missions of the client organizations the company serves. At the forefront of SmithBucklin's 10 Chosen Values is Client Stewardship.

Thank you for all that. Let's now turn to the main focus of our discussion. Can you share with our readers a story from your own experience about how you lead your team during uncertain or difficult times?

My tenure as SmithBucklin CEO between 2002 and 2015 was deeply fulfilling and rewarding both professionally and personally. During that period, the company achieved unprecedented success since its founding in 1949, including client satisfaction and retention, employee engagement, company growth, and financial performance. We also confronted and dealt with a number of difficult challenges. Most notably was the impact of the 2009–2010 economic crisis on client organizations and the strain on the company and employees, deepened by bank debt restrictive covenants which limited options. But I learned that adversity offers valuable opportunity to not only demonstrate and validate core strengths but to also drive learning and change toward an ever-higher standard. This requires re-imagining an even stronger future and preparing to achieve it. It's not about just survival where your thinking and focus is short-term day-to-day. This meant being deeply diligent and ruthlessly honest in recognizing our true strengths as well our weaknesses related to our services, people, operations, competitive positioning and other factors. In other words, during difficult, trying times, it's best to focus on your core strengths and mitigate your weaknesses versus just thinking about cost-cutting. It is tempting to simply focus on cost-cutting; after all, it is the easiest to implement, and it has the most immediate action and impact. Judicious cost-cutting, of course, plays a crucial role. The key is to know what expenses can be deferred, which can be eliminated, in what existing areas must we actually increase our expenses, and what new investments must we make in order to create the conditions for an even stronger future.

During that period, I initiated a material change in our executive management framework — both in terms of people and structure. We had to make the tough decisions around people as well as devote dollars, time, energy and heart to build leadership capacity throughout the company, hire new talent, prepare high-potentials and institute succession planning. All of this would have been easy to forgo for another year given the economic crisis we were facing. In addition, we increased our commitment in technology products and services, invested in our consulting and think-tank services to client organization usually at no additional fee, built our new Innovation Center, explored acquisitions, and as importantly, committed dollars to our most innovative and forward-thinking client organizations.

As CEO, I spent an overwhelming amount of my time and energy in communicating with clarity, persistence and context to all audiences — my senior executive team, managers at all levels, all employees and to my board of directors — on why we were forging ahead. But communicating the “why” and a compelling desired future state are not enough. In addition, I worked closely with my CFO and his team in preparing and assessing tight, frequent financial forecasting and scenario analysis. This way, we were best prepared to make adjustments or course-correct as new or emerging information and events took hold. When this would happen — and it happened frequently with the ever-changing internal and external landscape during 2009 and 2010 — I would be back communicating, clearly, openly, credibly and with context.

I’m proud that in 2011 SmithBucklin emerged even stronger and better positioned for the future. In 2013 and for each subsequent year since, the company achieved record-breaking financial performance.

Did you ever consider giving up? Where did you get the motivation to continue through your challenges? What sustains your drive?

As CEO, I am ultimately accountable for the vitality and long-term success of the company I serve. I am also responsible for the stewardship of our client associations, the welfare of our employees and the long-term interests of our shareholders, which took on even more meaning when SmithBucklin became 100% employee-owned in 2005. If not me, then who? Never once did it cross my mind to give up. The enormity of my role and its impact, both positive and negative, on the people and organizations I serve is my inspiration, sustains my drive and fuels my unwavering dedication and commitment regardless of challenges encountered, setbacks endured or high-stake crises confronted.

What would you say is the most critical role of a leader during challenging times?

To lift spirits, give hope and build strength in others. This requires that you stay “up” by enduring stress, exhibiting resilience and becoming mentally tough. This doesn’t mean you are artificial or adopt a what-me-worry, head-in-the-sand persona which can fall trap to wishful thinking and self-delusion. It means that you always have the “big picture” in mind. You confront difficulties and hardships but maintain an optimistic frame-of-mind with courage and conviction. And you tangibly demonstrate this for all to see through your frequent and clear communication, attitude, temperament, and everyday behaviors and key actions. In the end, it is often the difference in creating the conditions for a better tomorrow.

When the future seems so uncertain, what is the best way to boost morale? What can a leader do to inspire, motivate and engage their team?

You demonstrate empathy, compassion and kindness when interacting and dealing with others. After all, you can’t win people’s hearts if you don’t genuinely care about their welfare and well-being. You also find ways to celebrate “on-the-way” wins, even small ones. Through celebratory events and positive reinforcement, you will build confidence, spotlight desired outcomes and boost morale. Of course, staying “up” by enduring stress and demonstrating resilience, as mentioned above, is essential. Because of your position and authority, your attitude and temperament will be magnified, and will positively or negatively impact others with speed and intensity.

It's also critical you make yourself accessible and become even more visible. Make it a high priority to be present with your employees, frequently and with intention. Doing so allows you to directly inspire, influence, guide and teach. It also allows you to gain first-hand, unfiltered information, insights, and intelligence in order to adjust, be responsive and make the best high-stakes judgment calls. And always, always communicate clearly, openly, truthfully and from the heart.

What is the best way to communicate difficult news to one's team and customers?

First, always communicate issues, problems or bad news promptly and openly; no surprises! Don't let them fester. Make sure you communicate with clarity, openness, frankness and context. Confront the difficult or uncomfortable issues. If done with fairness, openness and objectivity, you will earn respect and trust. Always say what you mean and mean what you say. Tell the truth! People respect the truth whether it is good or bad news. If the bad news to a customer is a result of your company messing up, take accountability, say precisely how you are going to make it right, stay on top of your team to ensure problem is resolved, and then follow-up with the customer to confirm they are satisfied (or not). If you have to deliver bad news to a team member, do it honorably and fairly. And genuinely demonstrate compassion and empathy, and do all that you can to lessen the pain or fallout.

How can a leader make plans when the future is so unpredictable?

Be steadfast and vigilant about your key strategies, specific goals and immediate action plans regarding the future. But remain flexible and open because new information will surface, new or changing conditions or circumstances will emerge, and unexpected surprises will appear. In other words, know where you want to go but be comfortable with not knowing exactly how you are going to get there.

Is there a "number one principle" that can help guide a company through the ups and downs of turbulent times?

Recognize there's no instruction manual that guarantees success for any organization managing through difficult, uncertain times. But there is one certainty: All of the best strategies, creative ideas and brilliant game plans cannot succeed or be sustained without strong and effective leadership. In fact, leadership is the one imperative that enables everything else within an organization and its people, including focus and flexibility, agility and speed, strategic thinking and action taking, innovation and

boldness, passion and commitment, resilience and hardiness, and alignment and cohesiveness.

Can you share 3 or 4 of the most common mistakes you have seen other businesses make during difficult times? What should one keep in mind to avoid that?

By far the biggest mistake is the lack of attention, low priority, superficial focus, carelessness, deficiency and inadequate skills when it comes to communication from those in charge, especially the CEO. Well over 90% of all organizational problems are a result of communication — lack of, ineffective, poor, unclear, without context, wrong or misunderstood — that can and will often result in confusion, misinterpretation of intent, mistrust, inaction, low morale, wrong decisions, missed opportunities, conflict and ultimately bad outcomes. That's precisely why true leaders spend a considerable amount of their energy, focus and time on becoming great communicators. But great communicators are not just effective talkers and skillful writers. They are also active listeners of the spoken, observers of nonverbal cues and sensors of the unheard.

Another mistake I have witnessed is where the head of an organization (e.g. CEO, division or department head, or managing partner) focuses enormous amount of his or her time on clients, employees and upper management (or board of directors if you are the CEO), and little on his or her direct management team. However, as head of an organization, your most important audience is your management team (your direct reports) — by far. That doesn't mean you ignore the other audiences, obviously. But during such times, it's easy to fall trap to assuming your management team doesn't need you or hey, I expect them to step up and perform; that's why they are senior managers and got promoted. Afterall, clients are crucial, upper management (or my board) is evaluating me, and employees need me. Do not burden your management team with work that is not absolutely essential — you want them to be focused on their direct reports and with clients. If you burden them (even inadvertently) with what I call “administrative reporting” work, you will sap their time and energy away from what's truly important. For example, during 2009, I suspended a bunch of reports that were standard, including stuff for our board of directors. Instead, I spent time individually and collectively with my team (shortened time, not hours of meetings) getting briefed and asking questions. Then I took on the burden of preparing reports and analysis so that I and my CFO could make appropriate decisions and report to the board. And I suspended asking my direct reports to participate in board meetings; during normal time I always had one senior executive come to a board meeting and present. The senior executive participating in a board meeting of course had to prepare a lot. All good

during “normal times” — good for the executive and good for the board. But terrible use of time and energy during 2009/2010. I was mindful to always offer feedback, props and recognition to members of my senior management team. They are human and on the battlefield. Of course, I worked at doing this with as many employees as possible but by far my attention and time was focused on my direct reports. To be recognized and appreciated are two of the deepest needs in every human being.

At third mistake especially in sales-driven companies, is an intensified attention or even obsession on the “numbers” — sales, costs, margins, bank debt, cash flow and so forth. For any business, monitoring and managing these metrics are fundamental and essential. But sales-driven companies tend to put a disproportionate focus on numbers versus people and culture. Senior executives of such companies forget that numbers are delivered through people. You better take care of your people, enabling them, supporting them, communicating with them, hearing their needs, and bringing out the best in them. Perhaps focusing on numbers disproportionately buys you some short-term wins. But you can’t ensure endurance and long-term vitality without culture and the care and well-being of your employees and clients. I guarantee it.

Yet another pervasive mistake I have observed time and time again is the unwillingness or failure by those in charge to surface, confront and resolve conflict and issues among members of their management teams, between company divisions or departments, within a board of directors, and with clients. Unresolved issues and conflicts restrain human potential, perpetuate problems, create future problems, kill possible solutions, restrict opportunities and ultimately lead to failure. If they persist unabated for long periods of time, they also become cancerous, ultimately destroying the soul and fabric of organizations.

Generating new business, increasing your profits, or at least maintaining your financial stability can be challenging during good times, even more so during turbulent times. Can you share some of the strategies you use to keep forging ahead and not lose growth traction during a difficult economy?

Company growth is both a goal and a scorecard. As CEOs, we pursue growth as a goal because growth creates the means for our company to achieve its mission into the future. Growth also enables scale and efficiencies. Growth fuels our company’s ability to learn and renew. And growth creates opportunities. As a scorecard, growth confirms what our company is doing is relevant and valuable. Therefore, whether good times or

bad, a company must attend to, remain vigilant and excel at the three fundamentals of growth:

1.) Creating and maintaining a compelling and unique value proposition.

During uncertain and dramatically changing conditions, we must assess and challenge our value proposition. We can do this in countless ways including conducting research and staying close to our customers. But we must also not overreact. In other words, we must halt our pursuit and investment in new ideas and plans that aren't working but also ignite and escalate those that are. The key is to demonstrate and apply discipline AND flexibility, knowing when to stay the course and when to drive incremental or even transformational change. How you do that is a whole other discussion. But it starts with consciously being aware of these key principles and practices.

2.) Being “easy to do business with”

So many companies forget or pay little attention to this. This requires operational excellence and efficiencies, investing in the proper technology tools, and most importantly, a dogged philosophy and process to listen to your customers and then implement appropriate changes. During difficult, uncertain times, it's easy to forget about this fundamental of growth by paying little attention, cutting costs in this area, or both.

3.) Communicating and marketing in meaningful effective, consistent, innovative and frequent ways.

During tough economic times, it's tempting to reduce marketing expenditures, and many companies do. Doing so is a mistake for two reasons. First, your company and its brand could lose traction and awareness which could have a negative impact when the economy roars back, which eventually it will. And second, reinvigorating and communicating your message through innovative means and channels offers your company the opportunity to win market share.

Here is the primary question of our discussion. Based on your experience and success, what are the five most important things a business leader should do to lead effectively during uncertain and turbulent times? Please share a story or an example for each.

Two companies I served as CEO faced three high-stakes external crises — the dot-com crash, 9/11 and the 2008/2009 Great Recession. To help me be most effective in

confronting and navigating these crises while delivering my best for my colleagues, clients, boards and shareholders, I looked to the true meaning of leadership for inspiration and guidance. Through a process of exploring, discovering, adjusting and applying, I developed and put into action certain key principles and practices. I worked hard to consciously apply and continuously hone them. Below are five high on my list.

1.) Communicate incessantly with meticulous clarity and context.

Our brains are naturally conditioned to be influenced by and dwell on bad news, traumatic events and perceived impending peril. Our brains are also wired to think the worst when faced with vagueness. Psychologists refer to this as the negativity bias. Adversity — real or imagined, immediate or anticipated — expands and intensifies the negativity bias. This in turn can trigger angst, fear, anxiety and even paralysis. You can help mitigate this natural human phenomenon and help others better cope by communicating incessantly with meticulous clarity and context. This means frequent, credible and open communication free from vagueness, ambiguity and over-equivocation. It requires dogged, relentless focus and discipline as well as pushing and prodding others on our teams to ensure the information we are receiving is not confusing, hazy or nebulous. By preparing and materially enhancing your ability and commitment to communicate with others you will be better able to correct possible misconceptions, fill in information blanks, reinforce key positive points, provide additional context, clarify misunderstandings, offer different but credible and more positive points-of-view, uncover issues requiring further investigation, and share hopeful and empowering stories and anecdotes. And you do this in all communication situations, with small or large groups, one-on-one and in written form. People would be surprised and perhaps even shocked to know how much time, energy and heart I spent on preparing and communicating during those crises.

2.) Nurture and protect your culture.

Culture aligns hearts and minds and is key to organizational endurance and vitality. It's easy to lose sight of this during difficult, trying and uncertain times. After all you are required to focus attention on so many other essentials related to weakening financials, lost clients, legal obligations and countless other immediate issues and pressures. The companies that are most durable and achieve enduring success recognize that in the end producing best products, delivering compelling value propositions, creating the most efficient infrastructures, having the most aggressive sales forces and best marketing campaigns, and generating new and innovated ideas and process all require human

beings. Until machines do everything and machines produce and maintain the machines, it will always be about the human element. That's where culture comes in.

Authentic and well-articulated cultures shape behavior, are catalytic, ensure focus and ignite action. They do this by inspiring common purpose and shared meaning among employees, and by ensuring priorities and actions are clear and aligned throughout the company. But culture cannot be legislated. Nurturing and protecting a company culture starts with the CEO who also serves as its most important teacher and role model. As with communication, I made this a high priority. This showed up in countless ways such as reviewing and reinforcing the SmithBucklin Culture during company meetings, making important and sometimes difficult decisions to ensure alignment, and giving permission (empowering) while holding people accountable to stay true to our company's values even though doing so may be at odds with other desirable outcomes.

3.) Create the conditions for a better tomorrow.

While navigating through a crisis, a better future is about successfully withstanding and minimizing the negative impact to people and to the organization. It also means acquiring learning and initiating change toward an ever-higher standard going forward. Though true leaders pursue desired future outcomes with determination, relentless commitment and a steadfast work ethic, they know they can't do it alone. They must mentally prepare others and capture their hearts to join in the journey. But I learned that communicating your vision isn't enough. Nor does it suffice to convince others to join in the journey through your eloquence and charisma. You must create the conditions to achieve the better tomorrow by ensuring clarity, context and understanding, providing needed resources, supplying the right tools, removing barriers and clearing pathways, surfacing, confronting and resolving conflict, monitoring, measuring and reporting, and, applauding achievements, celebrating wins and rewarding performance.

4.) Focus on the things that only you can do.

A former client and valued mentor gave me some advice when I was in my early thirties that has had a profound effect on my thinking in all areas of life. He said to have the greatest impact on others, as well as achieve enduring success, you must focus on the things that only you can do as defined by your role, responsibilities, obligations and particular skills or unique circumstances.

No doubt there are things you can do better or more efficiently than others. You may even enjoy and prefer doing them. But I've learned that my most important and meaningful impact on the people and organizations I serve must start with the things that only I can do. If not me, who? That's we must never delegate, defer or dismiss the things that only we can do. We must prioritize them above all else, and make certain we have the time, energy and heart to do them.

During the three external crises, there were things that only I as CEO could and had to do including determining how to formulate messages and frame key actions for all audiences; providing direction and support to my management team; communicating directly to all employees, clients, board members and shareholders with clarity and credibility; making tough and often difficult judgment calls and decisions; and, ensuring that as a company we stayed true to our chosen values.

5.) Replenish your energy.

Time is finite. We all have exactly 24 hours in a day. We can't alter, manipulate or recover time. But energy can be expanded and regularly renewed. Therefore, rather than fret over time, we should instead concentrate on energy. When, where or under what circumstances do you personally get replenished or refreshed? The key is to know the type of energy you need, whether it is physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, or a combination thereof. Then identify your sources of needed energy which could be a place of beauty and serenity, physical exercise, quiet moments of reflection, a type of music, joyous memories, family time, conversation with a special someone, or a specific set of activities. Most importantly, tap into your sources of energy with discipline and relentless commitment not only when needed but also in preparation of what is ahead. During difficult, trying times, the weight of our responsibilities, expanding "to-do" list and ever-changing demands for our attention can be exhausting and difficult to switch off. To stave off being overwhelmed and depleted, we must know and access our sources of energy, every day and without compromise.

One of my sources of energy is watching movies in my theater room. Experiencing the escapism of movies while enveloped in sound and visual magic relaxes me, quiets my mind and reduces my tension. Working on the leadership learning programs I created and facilitate gives me energy and renews me mentally and emotionally. I knew how important it was for me to continue my work with these programs not in spite of some of the most demanding and stressful times, but rather precisely because of them.

Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

“Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power.” — Lao Tzu

As a passionate, lifelong student of leadership, I have come to know that self-awareness and self-management are the most consequential distinguishing qualities of true leadership. Here’s why. In the context of leadership, a most crucial aspect of self-awareness is knowing and understanding your impacts — positive and negative, small and large — on other people, and ultimately on outcomes. A high-degree of self-awareness allows you to develop and hone your ability to self-manage. Successful self-management means you regulate, adjust and control what you do and how you do it in order to elicit — not discourage or undermine — positive actions, emotions and behaviors in others, and ultimately to produce — not inhibit or derail — desired outcomes through others. After all, that’s how true leadership is revealed.

How can our readers further follow your work?

Through my website www.leadershipscalling.com and on LinkedIn.

Thank you so much for sharing these important insights. We wish you continued success and good health!