



The New Leadership?

As we work on our search assignments, it's hard not to stop to read the latest business headlines. Earnings restatements, potential bankruptcies, CEOs forced to resign....the list goes on and on.

It seems that every day another corporate chieftain is on the hot seat for some past actions or decisions. Top management teams across the globe are facing this new reality. And the top teams are not the only groups feeling this intense scrutiny. Corporate Boards of Directors are feeling the heat too. What once was thought of as a comfortable and prestigious role as a Board member has taken on a more serious and rigorous tone.

With all this occurring it's becoming more fashionable to look at the leadership qualities it's going to take in this post Enron era. Countless books and articles are published annually which describe the characteristics of an effective leader. Many of them are quite good but only a few describe actionable items one could take away and utilize in the work setting.

We came across one of the books that had an interesting title, "Execution...the Discipline of Getting Things Done," written by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan. As it turned out, we were also fortunate in seeing Bossidy present his findings at a recent New Jersey HR Planning Group meeting.

Bossidy, the former Chairman and CEO of Honeywell, is extremely straight forward and blunt. You can tell by his mannerisms that he is an action-oriented individual who believes that leaders have the direct responsibility to have a comprehensive understanding of the business, the people, and the environment.

Bossidy believes in some key principles, i.e., "building blocks," to create an execution environment.

- * Know your people and your business
- * Insist on realism
- * Set clear goals and priorities
- * Follow through
- * Reward the doers
- * Expand people's capabilities
- * Know yourself

But how to get these items done if your organizational culture is at odds with these steps? According to Bossidy you need an approach that is practical and completely linked to measurable business results.



"The basic premise is simple: culture change gets real when your aim is execution. You don't need a lot of complex theory or employee surveys to use this framework. You need to change people's behavior so that they produce results..."

The final piece of Bossidy's building blocks is to have the leader be very involved in having the right people in the right place. As Bossidy writes, "...the same leaders who exclaim that 'people are our most important asset' usually do not think very hard about choosing the right people for the right jobs."

So is Bossidy's view on the mark?

In our view there are some engaging perspectives he brings up. Certainly the need to keep things actionable and simple comes to mind. But Bossidy's slant has more appeal from a process standpoint. Creating and sustaining an environment to get things done is the key. Most change efforts fail because at the end of the day the focus is on the words and the strategic plan books rather than getting the work done.

So in this era of more in-depth scrutiny of our financial books, it also seems like the focus is turning to our management and operational processes. Perhaps one day we can refer to this new era as one of true accountability.

New leadership qualities? Your business bookshelves will soon be well stocked again with the latest and greatest theories. Any words of wisdom? We can think of some words we heard in the past....it's not what you say, it's what you do!