

Transcription - CEO Support and Peer Networks

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. Today we're going to have a look at how CEOs cope and where they go when they feel like they might need to do, what we used to call in the old computer days, a DOS dump, where they can just let go of their concerns and their worries and their successes and all of those things, and just look at if you are the top person in an organization, where do you go that you can be comfortable, feel like it's trustworthy and free of judgment to talk through the issues that you might feel you need some extra assistance with.

Before we get to something more magical, let's look at as a CEO you've got a company that has, in some cases, anything from a small business of 10 or less people or you can have hundreds of people. The key here is to remember that you are surrounded by talented people who create a culture. This culture will then encourage participation by your employees and they see that it is valued and they are listened to. You've got to give active signs to that and not just put words that we hear blah, blah blah. You need to actually practice that and let them know that they're heard, that you've heard them. I know that everybody is super busy, so this has to be practised throughout the organisation but the CEO has to show evidence that they are listening to every corner of their organisation.

So you could do that by saying, this idea, I like this, let's follow up on that or let's just pursue it further or let's investigate it and then let people know that. It could come from one of your direct reports, it could come from the CEO yourself but don't forget that absolute pool of talent that you have there that sometimes is not as utilised as I would like.

Just on that, I heard from someone in the recent past, who was at a meeting where he is a CEO and he was proposing a particular project that would have benefitted the organisation quite substantially and brought them into the 21st century very quickly. And one of the other senior people at the meeting said that never in his lifetime and he's a senior person, had he experienced innovation being driven by a CEO! Seriously.

I guess they come in all shapes and sizes and therefore as the captain of the ship so to speak, you have to show evidence that the culture is real and that you are looking for people to do that. Similarly, just on that same topic, I heard you mentioning at a meeting Kim, we sometimes when you're at the board of directors meeting, that is very tricky because a lot of people are there to almost

be on best behavior and give the right answers. To me, I think, relax a bit. You're supposed to be a team working together and if there are issues there and I'm not politically naive, I know all about the politics of those things, you need to work on them subtly and separately, but don't let that dominate how the board works and how much information and input you can get from your board members. Remember this - a lot of your board members have been CEOs in the past. A lot of those board members have got experience across industries. A lot of those board members are board members of more than one organisation. Granted they would be different in different industries because there's no conflict of interest and that's fine. Don't underestimate their input because they come across as annoying or questioning or whatever. Don't let that get in the way. If you, again, create a culture at the board level that is valued and respected whilst being politically astute and not play silly politics but know that it does go on, that's another resource I think can be better utilised.

I think it's part of the culture of an organisation that engenders that trust is that they rest of the group sees that that happens at the top because the influence comes from the top down. You can't expect the sense of the organisation to come from the bottom up because that's just not the way you would drive an organisation, As the CEO, as a board of directors, you need to be exhibiting the characteristics that you want from the rest of the organization, personal politics aside.

They're always going to be there - you need to manage them in a professional manner. The other thing is, we talked in the past so I'm not going to dwell on this but it's good to have access to a coach, a mentor or an accountability partner. Yes you heard that in other places but that would help. They're not the people that give you the answers, they are the people that would help you think aloud and in confidence, how to manage some of those politics without getting into it. It's more about holding you accountable to your ideals and making sure that you get what you want. These are other resources that will definitely help the CEO in many ways.

I thought it was interesting when we were talking to Nick Gorman, he was starting to move out of the industry that he knew into other industries and I find it an interesting intellectual dilemma. If you are the CEO, do you look for a mentor that is within the industry or knows your industry, or do you go to someone who is completely independent and have them really focused on what you're saying and bring other influences to the issues that you want to talk though?

That's really good and it's a segue into talking about what's available in that

space other than the individual one on one. Now there are groups and organizations. There's a CEO forum and they've been established for years, there's an international Chief Executive Officers and Chief Financial Officers and Human Resource Officers, all come to their own groups across industries. But there is one that's International Executive Forum as well and those ones you can Google and find the one that's best for you. That's exactly the point you just made Kim, that's really good, because you're all CEOs, if you go to the CEO forum here or international and they are not the same industry. So there's no conflict of interest but there's a lot of parallel learning. There's a lot of things that people have talked about, they've tried, it worked, it didn't work etcetera. I don't want to go into this topic because there's so much on it at the moment but in the four day week. It doesn't matter where you got it and where it's best. If you want to know more about it, this would be the perfect place to know in real terms what happens, not just public consumption of the media.

So in that sense, that network, make the time for it, make the time for these organizations where you will, and it's not just there for you to get things, it's for you to share things so you can all help each other and understand. For example, a young CEO had to do a major restructure and that's hard for anyone even if you've been in the business for 40 years as a ceo, cutting the organisation and reshaping it. He was able to talk with another person in a completely different industry and was able to prepare his feelings better. He was able to continue to stay professional and human and honest and truthful. But he learned about the timing, he learned about the communication, not just telling them but how do you help them digest the information. These are examples that you would learn from each other.

The other one that one of my accountability partners shared with me was about technology. Now, if you have something that, you know, you think of as manufacturing you wouldn't see what the relevance of that is on my organisation. The more you hear, the more you listen about what it was and how it got there and what benefits, you can maybe adapt the idea. That, to me, is the biggest, biggest winner for a CEO, to be in touch with those other CEOs.

This podcast is probably a perfect example of that. Although we worked together 30+ years ago (she said behind her hand!) we travelled different paths and we have worked in very, very different industries and the people who are listening to this come from every industry you could imagine. How do we keep the information that we're giving them relevant? It's by just talking about what we've done and in terms of a mentor or a coach, that's exactly what we're doing. We're just talking about what we've done. If you've not ever been through that process

before and you're unsure about how it works, it is simply two people having a conversation about issues much as we do hereon this podcast. We give our views and then we decide, after we've given our views, as you would when you are listening to us, what you will do with that information. It's not up to us to give you answers. Certainly when we do the case studies we're a bit more specific but when we are just talking about topics we will, as you know, go just back into our own experience and talk about what worked for us, what didn't work for us, what we saw someone else do, what we've read about and that's really the best way to surround yourself with a cushion, if you like, to sound off about the issues that you've got on hand.

The other one I hear a lot is, I work with CEOs and I do not for one minute, underestimate the level of responsibility, the dedication, the long hours etcetera and the reason I'm saying that is because I want you to keep up your network. You network, and a lot of time you're too busy, I understand if you're busy, but next time make time for your network. Your network is people that you worked with or knew, whether it's personally or professionally. The world is small, you go in and out of countries and you all know that you have, you work in different countries and the network gets more global. Keep in touch, technology is available to help you do that. You can work with your own way, in a sense that some of us would make a list, some of us would use a diary, some of us will do whatever. Whatever works for you, make room for your network. Just on that, time is your key, the blocker if you like. However, the other one, not as strong, I feel bad that I'm so busy but I have to go have coffee. It looks bad to me and to everyone else. You've got to change your way of thinking on that and look at the benefits and the investment. It's not just for you personally. The more you learn, the more you grow and you're going to be helping others. It's not just about you. Yes, it will help you but it helps you help others.

I think too, sometimes we prejudge what other people are thinking in that situation. For the most part if you're going out for coffee, 80% of your staff will look at that and say, oh he's going out for a while, what can we do while he's gone? I think that we judge on a much more negative level what other people are thinking than they are actually thinking. Sometimes they're not thinking about you at all, they've got their own issues and their own focus and their own priorities that they're worried about the fact that you're doing something else almost doesn't register. It's not something that I would fill my head with. What other people think is their business, not mine. That's how I have to live.

For those of you who are listening and the sound might have been a little different, it's raining on a tin roof, you're getting a very country feel to this part of

the podcast. I don't want you to be just lying back listening to the rain!

Yes you CEOs you've got to remember to look after yourself. You've got to help yourself by finding other like minds. Listen to people that don't agree with you, other CEOs that maybe made mistakes and the ones that had successes and you share those from different Industries and that will help.

We hope that this has given you some food for thought for our CEOs, our hardworking CEOs. For now, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.