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The IdeaBridge White Paper Series:
The Leadership Series:
Staying Cool When the Heat is on!



THE LEADERSHIP SERIES: STAYING COOL WHEN THE HEAT IS ON!

1

Summary

A Leader's true colors will always come through in those unguarded moments and in spontaneous reactions to unexpected events. This short article gives some great tips on how to stay cool when the heat is on and when all eyes are on you, watching your every move and reaction.

Staying Cool when the *Heat is on!*

- Leaders must remain cool and levelheaded at all times. Nothing gives one so much advantage over another as to remain cool and unruffled under all circumstances. Temper tantrums, snap decisions, finger pointing, yelling and blaming are all signs of panic. Good CEOs don't panic. They don't throw tantrums. They keep themselves in control so that they can keep control of the situation. Do not get angry, even if anger is justified. Tell yourself, force yourself, to stay calm, cool and collected. Do not be rash.
- Sometimes by moving too quickly, you open a Pandora's box of problems that were not present before the changes imposed by your snap decisions. This is very important to understand. These are called the "unintended consequences" of decisions, and at times, the aftermath of your decisions can be worse than the initial problem you tried to solve.
- Be careful to not be seen as overly directive, dogmatic or demanding. Check your ego. It's critical that you appear approachable and open to new ideas. There is a very fine line between getting things moving and overwhelming the company. You must be active without being perceived as going off in all directions, wrecking havoc at every turn.
- People are curious about the new leader's judgment, value, strategy, energy, style, etc. They will be watching you very closely to pick up any signs at all. You send signals through all of your small decisions, actions, interactions, emails, tone of your meetings, etc.
- It is crucial to set the right pace; if there is too little momentum, the leader can accelerate the pace by inaugurating new initiatives or changing key players. Conversely, he also must ensure that things don't get too crazy, too soon.
- It's very easy to get into trouble by appearing impulsive and making moves without thinking through all of the potential implications of your decisions.
- If you can make the jobs of others a lot of fun, they will work harder and more creatively and feel more satisfied with their careers and lives. The Leader who is able to maintain a sense of humor and to lighten the mental load of his colleagues will always have a motivated, happy team. A sense of humor is a mark of intelligence and is a quality that is desired in corporate presidents.
- Don't come in with the solution or claim that you have all the answers, even if you do. Be slow and deliberate in structuring solutions and remember to carefully think about the unintended consequences of your decisions.
- A need to appear decisive can cause you trouble. Some new leaders believe that they must prove themselves by projecting a confident, take-charge attitude. The danger with this is that the Leader



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2

may appear too swift and irrational, lacking the critical leadership element of patience and calm in the face of a stressful situation.

- *Leaders must be decisive, but "patiently decisive" and not jump at the first recommendation for a decision.* They should listen to all sides before deciding. In fact, on occasion, it's good practice for a Leader to postpone an important decision for a day or two, or even a week or two, while collecting additional information. Leaders must be comfortable soliciting contrasting views, and if possible, to sleep on important issues.
- Listening is the most important skill for leaders. If a leader is a good listener, he can accept ideas, criticism and other feedback that can improve the company.
- You want people to say, "Wow, he's decisive, but he just hasn't made his mind up yet." You see, you want people to see that you are decisive on the matters where you can afford to be. But on the much larger issues, you need the decisive reputation to carry you for a while in order to buy yourself some time to really evaluate the problem.
- New leaders get into big trouble when they believe that they must appear decisive and establish a directive tone. If the leader is seen as dealing superficially with deep problems, the resulting cynicism makes it difficult to rally support for change because people may not trust him.
- It is the mature leader who accepts even unfair criticism with equanimity, calmness and grace. Criticism can provide the very useful "reality check" that all leaders need in order to maintain perspective. Leaders must be brutally honest with themselves or they will slip into the terrible habit of self-deception. Even the best leaders make mistakes. By listening to criticism and quickly catching, acknowledging, and correcting mistakes, good leaders can become superb leaders.
- Regarding decision making: Although there may appear to be some urgency involved and you do not want to appear indecisive, exercise extreme caution and patience. In many cases, a fast decision leads to bad results that will come back to haunt you.
- At first, you will lack the insider's detailed knowledge of the company, its people, structure and systems, its policies and culture. Therefore you must take the time to understand it before you make any key decisions or moves.
- True Leaders can maintain a calm, internal confidence because they have worked hard, prepared for the tough moments, and have built on the successes of the past. In fact, Leaders must appear confident at all times, especially when the pressure is on.