

One Trait for Effective Leaders



I've been interviewing business leaders in preparation for my presentation at next month's ***It's a Duesy II Manufacturing Revival***. I won't give away too much before the March 17th event, but there are a few common topics that have come up.

One topic, Flexibility, was mentioned, unsolicited, in each interview. Their respective domains included Manufacturing, Finance, and Human Resources. As you may expect each brought the topic up in a different context.

From a manufacturing perspective, there is a need to be flexible in how companies are organized. Many manufacturing concerns use organizational models first developed in the post-World War II era. Companies like IBM, United Technology, Ford, GM, and the like, developed rigid, deep, hierarchical organizations. As a result, their ability to change to meet current needs was all-but beyond their grasp. Not until experiencing near-death experiences, such as with the Domestic 3, were they *finally* desperate enough to change.

From a human resources perspective, the need to be flexible is in contrast to more natural human instincts. Consider the December 2009, HBR article, ***To Be a Better Leader, Give Up Authority***. The general notion here is, “...companies reliant on knowledge and innovation should abandon the traditional structure in which decision rights are reserved for people at the top.”

It is important to *relax* the natural tendency to tighten up, become more controlling, in times of stress. To show how much this is ingrained in our nature, consider a motorcyclist in a moment of crisis. Riding into a corner too quickly, a less experienced rider may fear they can't make the curve. Their natural instinct is to tighten their arms, stare straight-ahead, and run right off the road. With experience and training comes the correct response: keep one's arms limp, avoid target fixation, and look where you *want to go*. In most cases, the machine's ready for the challenge, but the software becomes squishy.

From the finance perspective, it was pointed out the most effective businesses, are those with flexible leaders. These leaders always have a *vision* for their organizations, and they're *watching* the ever-blowing winds of change. As the winds change, so do they, and their organizations remain successful and profitable.

Their messages were consistent. To be successful moving forward, leaders need to be *flexible*, to watch for environmental change, and avoid the desire to hunker down until economic winds blow over.