

#BeingTheCEO: Session 1

Useful Further Reading & Resources

The difference between mission, vision, strategy and tactics

In this article we discuss the challenges for boards and CEOs of making the distinction between mission, vision and strategy. In the academy trust sector, Michael comments on the risk that trusts let short-term tactics define their goals, rather than ensuring that their mission and vision remains at the forefront of all decision-making. In making the distinction with CEOs and boards, Michael uses the analogy of 'the voyage':

The mission (or 'the business we are in') is essentially the purpose for setting out. Why are we going on this voyage in the first place?

The vision is essentially what we believe and hope, in our minds, the destination will look like. It is our aspirations and our ideals, defined with clear reference to broader opportunities and challenges of our current context. It should be compelling and relevant enough to people's lives to enthuse and inspire them to come with us on the journey.

The strategy is essentially the course on which our ship will sail towards the destination. That course will, in all likelihood, need to adapt as we encounter storms, currents and even pirates (!), but it will be charted in full and it will always be focused on the same destination that we aspire to reach.

Further information can be found: <https://www.forumstrategy.org/6003-2/>

Six things that set the CEO role apart

This article sets out six things that define 'the leap' from executive headteacher to CEO. Michael states that it is clear that the CEO role is still very new to the education sector and that there is certainly no single, defining approach to the job. He says that a key issue for new and aspirant MAT CEOs is 'making the leap' from executive headteacher (or sometimes, even, from headteacher) to the CEO role; and suggests six key differences between the CEO and executive headteacher roles, summarised below (source: Forum Strategy):

- **You are the accounting officer.** The buck really does stop with you, not with the local authority or someone else further up the tree who you can refer the issue to. That brings an added weight of responsibility and accountability – which means ethics and values are at a premium. The job can feel very lonely, but it shouldn't do. Whilst some CEOs fall under the weight, others embrace a new level of autonomy and freedom which, if supported by the right team of people around them and a high calibre board, can manifest itself in greater innovation and a greater ability to respond to the needs of those you serve. The good CEO maintains a 'direct line of sight' to the frontline – be it the pupils in the classroom, the hospital ward, or the shop floor.
- **You will find yourself leading diverse teams of professionals who are 'the experts'.** This is a defining shift. The headteacher or executive headteacher generally leads a senior leadership team of those who belong to the same profession. You are still seen as the 'expert in the room'. A CEO does not generally work within the same SLT dynamic. As I say in the book, this is the move from 'expert in chief' to 'learner in chief'. The mindset must change from being 'the person to ask' to the person who knows enough about each discipline and how to view specialist issues through a strategic, whole organisation lense. A good CEO will listen, listen hard, review all the facts and advice, and take the decision – often on the best

advice of their people and through a good dose of intuition fed by their years of learning and experience. That is inherently risky, and so the good CEO spends so much of their time building a team of talents who are far better than them.

- **You will enable rather than drive improvement.** This is a major transition for anyone who continues to be a CEO in an organisation where the 'bread and butter' work is also the CEO's area of professional expertise. An executive head drives improvement. These roles – such as National Leaders of Education and Local Leaders – are about leading from the front, demonstrating what success looks like on a day to day basis, and coaching colleagues on specialist functions. The CEO cannot do this – it is unsustainable. There are simply not enough hours in the week, nor should an organisation become so reliant on one person's specialist knowledge. Instead, the CEO creates the conditions through which improvement becomes an organisational habit; setting the vision for what improvement looks like and creating the capacity, culture, processes, accountabilities, and investment in innovation and research, that ensures improvement becomes the 'lifeflood' of the organisation. Some experienced NLEs and LLEs make this transition, others cling on for dear life to the job of school improvement leader – fearing they are doing themselves out of a job. A good CEO is always doing themselves out of a job! (See our 7 pillars of improvement at scale here)
- **You must prioritise the sustainable development of the organisation.** This means taking responsibility for the 'whole organisation' and the inter-dependencies between school improvement, HR, finance, technology, health and safety, governance and otherwise. The Executive Head can get away with employing a business manager who may be an accountant and can ensure budgets are balanced and some economies of scale are achieved. I am firmly of the view that a good CEO needs an experienced Chief Operating Officer, who can ensure operational delivery across the board, ensuring that the organisation is investing strategically in its people, its resources, and its relationships with others externally, to ensure the quality of provision the CEO expects. In an age defined by austerity and complexity, the CEO needs someone with an entrepreneurial mindset at their side, because maximising income and resources for this generation of children and their educational experience is at a premium. Entrepreneurial leadership is not a 'dirty phrase' anymore – it is a moral imperative. Simply cutting where we can and hoping for politicians to be generous is to fail in the defining challenge for this generation of leaders. To succeed here, a CEO requires someone who has experience of the world of enterprise, customer service, and organisational development – not simply restricted to that of budgets and procurement. This probably will – at this moment in time, at least – require the CEO to look beyond, rather than within, the sector for talent.
- **You will have an even wider outlook on the world.** As accounting officer and having the autonomy and freedoms they have, a CEO will need to foster a broader set of relationships internally and externally. Internally, given the size of the organisations they lead, they will need to 'step up' the way in which they communicate, sharing their leadership narrative through a range of mediums and events – and repeating it often (!), with authenticity and clarity. This will also help them to clarify their message externally, which will become even more essential. The organisation is not an island, it will – particularly in an age of austerity and complexity – need to engage and involve a wide range of stakeholders. The CEO must lead on this, being discerning in which partnerships align with organisational strategy (and which will just sap time and energy) and taking time to develop positive and constructive relationships with a broad list of stakeholders who they maintain relationships with – not least ministers and local politicians, local businesses, health leaders, and community groups to name a few. This is the age of leadership for generating social and professional capital – and the CEO is at the heart of that.
- **Your professional development and support is even more important (not less so) now you are CEO.** CEOs need to invest time in understanding the politics and the political dynamics their organisations are operating within – this is not simply about responding to education policy, it is about playing your part in education policy development and sector 'thought-leadership' wherever possible. This is your professional development. It's also about having a broader view to changes in charity law, employment law, health and safety regulations and economic regeneration projects – all of which may impact your organisation. Social and economic issues must be monitored and anticipated – feeding into strategic planning. Currently these can include, for example, risks and opportunities of emerging technologies, the changing nature of the jobs market – and employee expectations, and understanding trends such as worsening mental health issues and how to mitigate these. The

CEO should embrace the advice and guidance of a board of trustees who can bring a level of insight appropriate to the scale of the organisation and its influence; – not having access to a good board is a real danger for a CEO and should be a big consideration when taking on the job. The role also requires the CEO to set aside the necessary time for strategic reflection and planning – something our weekly #TrustLeaders briefings help to facilitate, given that some CEOs struggle to set even an hour aside to this in any given week! Finally, the transition to CEO also usually involves a transition in executive support. You need executive support of the highest standard – a PA or executive assistant who can interact confidently and on your behalf with senior external stakeholders and governing board members, and who can fulfill the role of managing the CEO’s diary – something that has a direct link to your ability to do the job, and to do it well.

Being The CEO – the importance of goals

Rachael Gacs, Resources Manager, Forum Strategy and Editor of #TrustLeaders Magazine

“Directing attention toward where it needs to go is a primal task of leadership.”

— Daniel Goleman, *Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence*

Life, we’re told, is full of choices; and that has never been truer than in 2020. In today’s world, CEOs and their organisations can be readily overwhelmed by a raft of new agendas, priorities and ideas coming at them from all angles. The pressure to address technological change, the sustainability agenda, and meeting the growing expectations of regulators, amongst other things, brings opportunity, but also growing demands on executives. Demanding or undisciplined boards can also add to the pressure.

CEOs only have a finite amount of time and using that precious time wisely and strategically (rather than reactively), can be the difference between success and failure. That is why diligent goal setting matters. As a Chief Executive, goal setting is unlikely to be new territory for you. Goals are, of course, essential for the success of any organisation, and for every individual within it. This is because they guide our focus, trigger and mobilise our behaviour, sustain our momentum, and ultimately (we hope!), bring about our most desired results .

Yet, the problem for many Chief Executives is not a lack of goals, rather it is having too many of them! Research tells us that what sets the best CEOs apart from the merely average is the number of goals and priorities they have. According to Mark Helow, founder of ‘The CEO Project’: “The top CEOs spend a lot of their time on a few things. They spend more than half their time on what they determine as their three top priorities. Contrast this with as average CEO who will spend time on a whole myriad of priorities and never gets to many of them. This ability to focus is one of the key things that sets top CEOs apart. They will focus on a small number of priorities at one time – they will not give up and they not get distracted.”

The full article can be accessed here: <https://www.forumstrategy.org/being-the-ceo-the-importance-of-goals/>

Being The CEO – the importance of time management

As CEOs, we are managing multiple stakeholders – boards, staff, end-users (in your case pupils and parents), regulators, government, suppliers, peers, community leaders and more. We’re also juggling a significant amount of information and managing a lot of (varied) expectations placed upon us. Finding a way of keeping on the ‘front foot’ and avoiding being overwhelmed or overly reactive, is absolutely essential.

Now, what works in terms of time management and personal organisation varies from person to person. What works for one person may not work for another. However, too often CEOs ‘wing’ time management, often using time based on their instincts as in previous roles, and failing to reflect on what really works for them in this unique role. It is impossible to create the necessary habits and

processes for managing our time and energy as CEOs if we haven't reflected on which habits and processes work best for us in the first place. When coaching CEOs, reflecting on time and energy management can often be a defining and transformational moment for a CEO.

Why does all this matter? First, this is a very different role and it is about our wellbeing. If we feel overloaded and out of control – as can easily happen in the CEO role, we tend not to operate as well as when we have a clear sense of what our priorities are – what we have to do and in what order. Secondly, for CEOs, the scale of our responsibilities, the volume of information and the diversity of relationships demands that we take a more reflective and – to a degree – methodical approach to how we use our time and energy on behalf of the organisation. We simply cannot afford to miss important meetings and tasks and descend into operational matters that don't reflect our (and our trustees') big goals. Thirdly, if we are clear about those habits that work for us, our team understands how best they can engage with us and work with us and relationships become better as a result.

What this article does not intend to do (for the most part) is to tell CEOs how to spend their time, but simply to provide some practical tips for how they manage it. So what are our practical essentials as CEOs? Michael covers 'the notebook', the diary, emails, meetings, and personal time.

Full article: <https://www.forumstrategy.org/being-the-ceo-the-power-of-time-management/>