A Note From Dave

Finding and retaining the top talent is key, not only to the success of your organization, but your individual success as a leader as well. But recruiting and retention strategies are being taxed these days by a variety of challenges, making it increasingly difficult to get the best and brightest on your team.

In their book, *Workforce Crisis,* Ken Dychtwald, Tamara Erickson and Robert Morison presented a list of recruiting and retention issues, from tightening labor markets, to shortages of skills and experience, shortages of educated candidates, pressure on training and development, and strain on organizational coherence.

These issues are incredibly challenging and could be a struggle for a long time. Each and every one demands a great deal of focus. But if you had to pick just one to focus on, to change, which would it be?

If I had to choose, I would say that the shortage of educated candidates is one of the greatest challenges and one that needs immediate attention. While it certainly isn't the solution for everything, education is definitely a cornerstone of future leadership; it's where our future leaders develop their management skills. *Workforce Crisis* notes that colleges won't graduate enough candidates to fill the technical, information-intensive, judgment-intensive jobs in five years. That's a very scary thought; especially since the problem will likely get worse before it can possibly get better.

Without educated leaders, how will it be possible for our country to maintain its position as a social, political and economical world leader? I believe education is the most powerful resource we have as we continue to compete in a global market. What can you do to help?

Sincerely,

Dave

Dave Opton
ExecuNet Founder & CEO
www.execunet.com/davesblog

Working for a Younger Boss
By Marji McClure

We've most always worked in a world where bosses are older and have more years of experience under their belts than we, their direct reports, do. But that world has changed. Bosses are getting younger and younger, and executives who are accustomed to being veterans on their executive team must get used to this shift that will most likely continue.

"From a relative perspective, the overall mix of ages in the workforce is changing dramatically — a higher and higher percentage will be 'older'," says Tamara Erickson, president of The Concours Institute. "Therefore, more and more bosses will have people working for them who are older than they are. In the absolute sense, I do expect that many of the Gen Ys who are entering the workforce now (those under 28) will assume leadership roles at earlier ages than we've seen others assuming them over the past several decades, in part due to the departure of a large number of Boomers from the workforce and the resulting increase in leadership openings."

Generation Y's relatively fast rise to the top can also be attributed to Generation X's disinterest in managing or being managed, says Jean Erickson Walker, Ed.D., executive vice president of Pathways/OI Partners.

Regardless of why the shift in leadership is occurring, it is a necessary one. But it is perhaps a movement many executives didn't think they would be dealing with so soon — or at all — during their careers.

"That [shift] has to happen by nature as the age groups evolve," says Robert Wendover, managing director of The Center for Generational Studies, a sociological research firm based in Aurora, Colo. "In some cases, it may happen earlier than anticipated, because those in the emerging generation are getting better formal training in management through college programs and their own focus on developing versatility. At the same time, Baby Boomers plan to remain in the workplace longer than originally thought. So there may be a bit of tug of war over certain positions."

Perception Problems

One of the biggest issues is that both the younger boss and older executive oftentimes have preconceived notions about the personality and performance of each — notions that are not always accurate. According to Linda Dominguez, CEO for Executive Coaching and Resource Network Inc., some of the beliefs an older executive sometimes brings to the

Your Career Advisor
Make Your Change Style Work for You
How to move your organization ahead without leaving everyone else behind

Dr. Chris Musselwhite, Ed.D.

Maybe you're one of those leaders who thrives on change, viewing setback as a challenge, risk as an opportunity. It could be your most important strength — or your biggest vulnerability. The key is being aware of your personal "change style" and how it affects the people you're leading. Without this awareness, you could be alienating the very people you need to make the desired change a reality.

If you agree that it's lonely at the top, maybe you need to reflect on how you got there. The same behaviors that helped you achieve your current success may also be alienating the people you need to continue being successful.

Observing leaders of global organizations of all sizes, it's clear that successful entrepreneurs are effective change leaders who share a special set of sensibilities and strengths; their drive, creativity and willingness to take risks are just a few examples.

If you recognize yourself in that description, chances are you're never happier than when events are in flux, because you know opportunity is born of change. What you might not realize is how your gung-ho preferences for dealing with change may negatively affect the people who must share your vision in order to make your organization succeed.

After surveying over 41,000 managers on their preferences for dealing with change, we've created a profile of leaders who readily embrace change, detailing their four top characteristics and some advice to help ensure they aren't negatively perceived by others. If you see some of yourself in these characteristics, consider trying out the practical advice provided. You'll increase your effectiveness as an agent for change, and you'll improve your relationships with others all along the way.

Lack of Regard for Rules and Policy
This can be good, it means you're not bound by convention. But it can also affect the quality of other people's work, which can set a bad tone for people you manage. Those who place high value on established processes can perceive it as arrogant or unethical.

Advice: Have a clear set of guiding values you won't violate. As a leader, you are in a position to make the rules. But whatever you decide, you must follow it or involve other people in your decision to skirt or change the rules, especially if their performance is affected by the decision.

Tendency to be Less Team-oriented
Again, this can be a good thing. You're willing to leap ahead, and to take the heat if things go wrong. But it may seem to others that you are an independent contributor, less aware of

Chris Musselwhite, Ed.D. is an adult learning expert and president/CEO of Discovery Learning Inc. (DiscoveryLearning.com), a provider of leadership and organizational development assessments and simulations to clients in 30 countries worldwide. Author of *Dangerous Opportunity: Making Change Work* (Xlibris, 2004), Chris can be reached at cmusselwhite@discoverylearning.com

feelings and emotions of others.

When you tend to be an intuitive thinker, you see things in terms of concepts and are interested in how things work. You may not spend as much energy considering how the implementation of your ideas will affect the established ways people work together. A lack of team orientation can also appear to be self-serving, leaving everybody behind in your decisions. If that happens, when you're ready to move forward on a new concept, you may find you don't have the support to make it work.

> Observing leaders of global organizations of all sizes, it's clear that successful entrepreneurs are effective change leaders who share a special set of sensibilities and strengths; their drive, creativity and willingness to take risks are just a few examples.

Advice: Make sure that you incorporate people important to the success of your ideas into the decision-making process — especially those who think differently. You should work extra hard to demonstrate your willingness to be team-oriented early on. It just doesn't work when it's too late. It's frustrating because you may feel you're being forced to slow down, but doing it now may avoid having to do it later in the middle of implementation, when timing can be much more important.

More Emphasis on Great Ideas; Not as Much on Follow-through

You may believe that the hard work is in the thinking and conceptualization of new ideas and not so much in the doing. Your heart is more in the invention than the implementation. But if you've damaged relationships through a lack of regard for teamwork and following established processes, you won't have anyone else taking up the slack when times get tough. Over the long term, you may have alienated the very people whose commitment to implementation is necessary for your new ideas to succeed.

Advice: Make sure you are following clearly defined processes and structures. To achieve follow-though, you must rely on those policies and systems. Limit the amount of time spent exploring possibilities. Spend more time engaging potential collaborators and anticipating implementation problems. Set timelines, and include yourself in the required accountability.

Not Detail-oriented

Change leaders like to spend a longer time in the exploration phase of change, and often aren't interested in mechanics of how things work or get accomplished. You may overlook details crucial to the implementation of your idea. It may not be a flaw in your idea so much as a forgotten detail, but still it makes you vulnerable and opens your ideas to sabotage by people you may have alienated due to a perceived lack of regard for processes and teamwork. This could be due to a lack of understanding of the culture — especially when it comes to trying to change the culture. As a result, change leaders may not deal with details until there is a crisis, and then they may over-manage.

Advice: Get other people in place and involved who are good with details, project management and implementation, and then listen to them all along the way. You'll win their support and ensure the success of your ideas. ■

Younger Boss

relationship include:

- That the younger person couldn't possibly be strong enough to lead me, and is likely immature and a loose cannon.
- That the younger person doesn't have enough/as much experience, therefore I'll have to show him/her what real life is like.
- That since the younger person is the age-equivalent of my adult children, our relationship will be that of child-parent rather than boss-subordinate.

The younger executive's perceptions of an older executive are along a similar vein, notes Dominguez, as they include:

- That the more mature person is inflexible, slow, tired, not productive, old-fashioned, unable to keep up and hard to manage; as opposed to the youthful exuberance, energy, adaptability and flexibility of a younger person, who also has access to and appreciation of the newest and latest education and processes.
- That the more mature person really, down deep, wants to be the boss, so the younger person needs to protect his/her territory.

Finding Reality, Building Relationships

When a new, younger boss begins leading older executives, it's important for both groups to abandon the above preconceptions and start building a solid working relationship. Wendover suggests that older executives offer their help to their new boss and not be discouraged if he or she doesn't immediately accept.

"Be prepared to be put off at first simply because the new person is trying to get his/her feet on the ground," says Wendover. "Sometimes it takes a little perseverance." Dominguez agrees that an older executive needs to respect the new boss regardless of his or her age, gender or demographic category. "The company chose the person for the leadership role because the company believes in his/her ability to succeed," says Dominguez. "Your job is to make that person success-

---

---

ful." You have to give the leader a chance to show his value, Dominguez adds.

At the same time, it's also a good idea to show your own value to your new boss. "If you have a skill that your younger boss seems unaware of, gently, carefully and modestly inform your younger boss of your expertise," says Dominguez.

In addition, attend industry-related seminars or classes to enhance your skills. And while your new boss may resemble your son or daughter, you can't treat this individual like a child. While it may be tempting, you have to maintain a professional, adult relationship with your boss. "A cardinal rule is to resist any urge to parent your boss. When you are asked for advice, focus on business, remain professional and show respect," adds Dominguez.

Do's/Don'ts For the Younger Boss

If you're on the other side of the desk, your new direct reports are substantially older than you are — how you approach your relationships with these individuals can determine your overall success as a leader at your current organization and beyond. First of all, avoid feeling the pressure to justify your qualifications, notes Walker. Instead spend more time cultivating the experience your team possesses.

Open lines of communication are key to accomplishing this, but unfortunately, one mistake young leaders often make is not effectively communicating with their employees. "Because young people don't socialize on the job as much, they some-

Younger Boss
Continued from page 4

times forget to get out among the troops and build the initial relationships," says Wendover. "This always takes time; and the impatient, get-it-done-and-go-home boss will find that he/she will not gain the psychic support and benefit of the doubt that needs to be earned if trust is to evolve."

It's also important to leave your preconceived notions at the door, adds Erickson. She suggests listening and asking questions early in the transition. "Bring the strengths that you have to the situation from the perspective of adding to the strengths of the group, rather than repudiating the group's previous approaches," says Erickson, also a member of BSG Alliance, and author of the weekly discussion forum, "Across the Ages" at HBSP Online.

"For example, many younger individuals have strong experience in collaborative environments. Bringing these approaches to the team may offer a new way of working. Integrating technology that makes the work processes faster and easier may be another contribution a new boss can make." At the same time, don't discount all of the processes already in place, cautions Erickson. They may need to change, but it's important to first understand why the processes even exist. Don't rock the boat until it's absolutely necessary. "The young boss needs to think in terms of 'What can I learn here?' as well as 'How can I make it better?'" adds Erickson.

Lastly, it's certainly natural to make a connection between your older employees and your parents, at least in your mind. But don't mention it. "Take the 'You remind me of my father/mother' out of your consciousness," says Dominguez. "Resist any temptation to speak to your Boomer worker as if he were your parent. If your Boomer worker approaches you with parental advice, gently guide them back to a business focus."

Common Goals, Common Bonds

The age difference between a younger boss and older executives will also add a unique dimension to the relationship

that can't be ignored. Wendover compares work relationships to a marriage in that both parties need to work together to create a long-lasting and successful bond.

"Both the Boomer and the boss should strive for consensus — figure out what you both agree on and build from there," says Dominguez. "For example, you will most likely agree that completing a project on time and budget is the primary goal. From that platform of agreement, determine how you can align any differences on the 'how' of accomplishing the goal."

Dominguez suggests that older executives begin a dialogue with their younger boss to truly define exactly how they can best collaborate. This includes understanding how often the boss wants to discuss ongoing projects, since each generation has different views on how often such discussions should take place. Also important is to determine how communication will occur — via the telephone or email.

"Keep in mind that the younger the employee (in general), the more

frequently he/she is accustomed to interacting," says Erickson. "Older workers therefore should not interpret frequent messages from the younger boss as a sign that he/she doesn't trust the older worker, but rather just as a difference in communication style and habit." It's also vital that all parties form a consensus about how performance will be measured. "Boomers tend to base performance on results and Gen X managers focus on results plus style, behavior and 'getting along'," notes Dominguez.

Once the two generations open the lines of communication, they will likely find common bonds and will recognize that their overall goals are the same. They should also begin to realize that both bring unique skills and perspectives that, combined, can make their organization even stronger.

"The key, as with any relationship, is to recognize that both people bring something to the party," says Erickson. "The older worker may have more experience in the specific industry than the younger

---

Improving Generational Workforces through Training and Development

Because the current — and future — workforce will consist of employees who represent diverse generations, it's important that your organization help those workers learn how to succeed in such an environment. The Families and Work Institute prepared *Tips for Managers: Generation & Gender in the Workforce* for the American Business Collaboration, which outlines several suggestions, including:

Develop training programs that help employees understand and respect differences among the generations.

- Develop workshops that share information about how diverse generations differ and are the same. Include role playing or other experiential learning activities where employees can learn to take the perspectives of others.
- Through these workshops, give employees experiences in addressing and solving typical problems that arise in a multigenerational workforce.
- Include dealing with differences in generations as a part of regular management training, including people who are significantly older or younger than oneself.

Improve the talent development system for employees of all ages.

- Increase opportunities for mentoring and networking for employees of all ages. This can include mentoring and networking where older employees help younger employees, or reverse mentoring, where younger employees teach older employees skills they may not have, such as technology skills.
- In networking or conferences, profile examples of successful women and men, and those of different generations, who have followed nontraditional career paths or worked flexibly and yet have been successful. Employees need to see that there are many paths to succeed, although these examples are often unknown, yet exist in every organization.

Difficult Doesn't Have to Be So Difficult

By Judith E. Glaser

No one could believe it — Radio Shack let thousands of people go, and they did it through email! This is just one example that most people dislike delivering bad news in person and will find any way to avoid it.

Making eye contact with another person who you care about and then delivering a difficult message will probably create disappointment, upset or hurt, and is one of the most difficult things for human beings to do. So, rather than confronting these challenges, we often take too many alternatives, which at the time seem to be less challenging or hurtful but later turn out to cause more pain.

Clouding the Issue

Two years ago I was asked to coach a CEO who was one of six reporting to a chairman. The difficult message the chairman wanted to give this CEO was that if she didn't raise the performance of her team she would be asked to leave. Rather than giving that message, the chairman wrote a six-page report that provided feedback, and 98 percent was about how good the CEO was.

Embedded in the document were a few lines which briefly stated that the chairman expected a higher level of performance from the CEO. When I asked what this document communicated to her and what she would do as a result, she didn't see the red flags. She felt she was doing everything right and was on the right track for her bonus.

Failing to be candid with others is one of the largest reasons why people ultimately leave companies. When key messages are embedded into larger messages, they get lost and are "sandwiched in," which means we can easily discount them or deal with them as less important.

Candor is Golden

In the July/August 1997 *Harvard Business Review* article called "Fair Process," the authors W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne state that "people do care about outcomes, but they care more about the processes that produce those outcomes." People want to know where they stand and why. If there is a difficult message they need to hear, employees would prefer to know the truth rather than a watered down or clouded version of it.

> " **Candor communicates respect, and that is what people want most.** "

Candor must supersede the fluff. Fear of telling a person they have failed, or are about to be fired, or they didn't make the cut are realities in life. We all know this. Yet we do more harm to an individual by trying to soft pedal our way through a difficult conversation.

Questions to Not Just Ponder

How should a leader address customers, shareholders, the press, employees? Are there different components of the message that should be shared with one group and not another? Who needs what type of information?

For example, your company failed to make its numbers this quarter and it's because of a delay in the launch of a product. There will be an impact on stock price, or deliveries, on employee bonuses — so the impact is across the board with employees, shareholders, press and even customers. Identify where the effects lie, take responsibility for the event, ask people to accept your apology, explain your new strategy for making it better, and ask for their ongoing support or help in any way that is needed.

Unmet Expectations

Most difficult messages come from a very common origin — unmet expectations. I failed to deliver the results you expected. You failed to deliver the results I expected. It is difficult because it contains embarrassment and disappointment — two things human beings dislike the most. It is a social embarrassment; and when this is the core of the context, then people want to deflect the message, minimize it, blame others, avoid it — or any other tactic they can think of.

Every difficult message has some dynamics that are unique to the situation. And each group of people may have different messages they are required to share, however there are a few things in common with all. These are all people, and in each case they are important relationships that you want to preserve and sustain even though the message you need to discuss or deliver is different.

If you don't care about the relationship, then you can say anything you want. In this case you can "data dump"

> **Judith E. Glaser founded Benchmark Communications, Inc. (BenchmarkCommunicationsInc.com) in 1980, a firm that works with CEOs and their teams to help them focus on competitive challenges in a world of moving targets. Benchmark's clients include: Clairol, Inc., Reed Elsevier, Merrill Lynch, Siemens, Pfizer, Coach, Inc., Liz Claiborne, Lipton, VeriSign, Thomson, Novartis, Verizon, Citibank, Donna Karan International, Champion International and Exide Technologies. She is the author of *Creating WE: Change I-Thinking to We-Thinking & Build a Healthy Thriving Organization* and *The DNA of Leadership.***

or get the situation off your chest and act mindlessly about how you say it. Sometimes this can be venting or letting it all out, if the issue is about your relationships with them.

However in most other cases, if your goal is to share something that is considered "difficult" and you want to sustain the relationship, you need to set the context for a sustained relationship up-front so the person knows that this may be difficult for both of you...and that you care about them regardless of how difficult the message will be.

In addition you want to be explicit and honest about what you are sharing. Candor communicates respect, and that is what people want most. Not candor that looks like blame or anger, but candor that looks like the real truth.

A Process for Discussing Difficult News with Candor and Caring

When bad news can be set in a context for future growth, it is no longer seen as bad news — it's seen as a new way to achieve success. Too often, we project "feared implications" onto a difficult conversation, and make it mean the worst-case scenarios that our mind can conjure. As a result, we begin to fear the encounter so much that we either avoid it or we project fears into it that are beyond what is healthy — thereby shaping the actual impact in negative ways.

We can minimize the impact of this difficult situation by setting the context for the conversation first. First we need to start by asking ourselves a set of questions even before the conversation so we are prepared to move ourselves mentally from fear and protection to a state of partnering.

Prepare with Self

1. How do I want this person to feel after our conversation?
2. What can I do to allow them to hear the news with an open mind and heart?
3. How can I set the context for an empathetic exchange?

What to Do

- Be specific and clear about what is happening, rather than clouding the message with hyperbole.
- Focus on outcomes and especially those that may be good or better for the person down the road. They are focusing on the loss, and you want them to focus on how to use this situation to grow and to gain something better than what they had before.
- Deliver the message in person whenever you can. It's honest, caring and does make a difference. It also allows a discussion about feared implications which are what often cause people to spiral down. Fear implications are "mental imaginations of the worst" and they can be controlled by a dialogue around the news.
- Conference calls are next best after face-to-face. Again it allows for dialogue. Emails or newsletters are last on the list. It turns something that should be personal into something very impersonal — and that is the wrong message to be sending. Some employees have learned their company is going down, or they will be losing a job in the newspaper...that is the worst example of how to do it right.
- Be open to discussing the impact and implications of the news. People will always say after the fact, that when a leader was open to discussion, it makes them feel that the difficult news was palatable. If the process of exchange is fair and open, with candor, respect and caring, then they feel they can accept the news. Also, if there is dialogue they may come up with other ways of handling the situation that had not been revealed before.

Engage with Others

Set the Context for Caring and Empathy: You can't partner unless you care. Examples include everything from: "I need to have an important conversation with you...and I really spent time thinking about it before I called" to "I really care about you and what you are thinking and feeling about this...and I believe this will be a very valuable conversation for us."

Explore Desired Outcomes: Share what you hope they will gain from the conversation because conversations help us grow! Use language that includes: "I really hope this will help you grow," "Understand something important," "Take away the confusion, clarify or deepen understanding," etc.

Share Perspectives with Candor: Be open, honest and non-judgmental. People usually know when they have failed. Be empathetic, yet firm. When you find things that the person clearly missed say, "Let me share something you can do in the future to make this phase easier to manage;" or "What we're going to talk about are the projects you were working on — I know they were important to you, and to me. This was a very challenging project with lots of unexpected dynamics and at the end of the project the results were not what either of us

expected." Focus on the future so this is a learning experience!

Discover What's Important to Both of You: It's important to discuss the news in the context of a larger frame-of-reference. For example, if it's a person who failed to deliver results and they are scared that they really disappointed you, you can say something like: "I'd like to hear more about how this unfolded for you. What do you think worked well? What did not? What was the toughest part?" Then share your perspective and together get a clearer view of what happened. Be sure you make as few assumptions or interpretations as possible — and listen well!

Agree to Next-Steps: Discuss how to do this differently in the future. Make sure the person realizes how to improve, not just that they missed the mark. People are usually more responsive to "constructive foresight" than "constructive criticism" which sends most of us into protect behavior.

Contract for Success: Discuss what you need to give and receive for this to be successful. How will you measure success? How often will you communicate? What will you each do if the changes are not working? ■

Younger Boss
Continued from page 5

boss, but the younger boss may have some new perspectives that will improve the way things have 'always' been done. Both individuals need to be open to learning from each other."

Since a multigenerational workforce is not going to go away, learning from each other and learning to work together is essential for both individual and corporate success. "With genuine interest in learning about each other's viewpoints and recognition of the vast resource generational differences can

bring to enhancing marketing potential as well as internal innovation and productivity, there is ample opportunity to create a culture of curiosity and respect," says Walker.

"If you work to prove how powerful, smart or talented you are, there will be no opportunity for you to become comfortable with individuals who are different from you; and with that discomfort comes conflict and a pink slip," adds Dominguez. "If you work because you love what you do, because you enjoy making a contribution, then there is no age, gender, or any other difference that will come between you and success." ∎

Learnings from Landings
Internet, Networking a Powerful Combo

The Internet has certainly changed the way job seekers find their next new opportunity. Scanning online job postings is a fairly non-laborious task and it makes researching potential employers easier than ever. But job seekers must remember that's not the only tool that can help them land their next job, a fact not lost on ExecuNet member Ted Aldrich.

The 49-year-old technology executive landed his new position in only three months by using the Internet as just one resource in his job search strategy. "Don't use the Internet exclusively," advises Aldrich. "It's a good source for finding and understanding positions, but isn't good for getting over the hiring hurdle."

Aldrich says he used online job posting aggregators (such as Indeed.com) and

used ExecuNet and Upladders as job search training resources. The Internet was also helpful in researching company backgrounds and their officers. "The information [ExecuNet] provided me was helpful in setting expectations and the search was generally as expected," says Aldrich. "The biggest surprise is how seemingly insignificant contacts can be critical to a search."

As a result, Aldrich says that networking was perhaps the most effective strategy in his short job search; and he suggests keeping networking contacts fresh. "I saw the position online and contacted a friend inside the company who acted as a reference for me," says Aldrich. Overall, Aldrich says there were two things that made his search a success: "Networking and using the Internet search engines for company

background work and for learning how to do the search more effectively," he says.

One component of the job search oftentimes includes building effective and beneficial relationships with recruiters. Aldrich notes that recruiters can be effective service providers if executives know how to work with them. "Always remember that the recruiter doesn't work for you," says Aldrich. "They work for their client. Helping them be successful, even if that doesn't land you a job in their current search, can help you in the future."

Aldrich adds that this was his first jobless job search and that if he could relive the process, he would have tried to be less stressed. "I would have taken it a little slower and enjoyed my time off a little more," says Aldrich. ∎

ExecuNet

www.execunet.com