

What Is NOT the Job of a CEO?



Last month on our blog, we discussed the make-or-break responsibilities of a CEO that truly move the needle—the parts of the role that go beyond the day-to-day duties.

But there are also some qualities of CEOs that are all-too prevalent. These tend to be the “burdens” that CEOs feel they should handle (but that actually hinder progress). Part of moving the business forward means knowing your limits and what responsibilities and attitudes are NOT part of the job, starting with one of the biggest roadblocks for a company:

It is not your job to be unhappy. Maybe this sounds obvious, but it probably resonates if you are (or have ever been) in the founder’s seat. Chief executive officer is a high stress job, even under the best of circumstances. When I was running MineralSoft, sometimes I accepted the idea that it was my duty to worry and to suffer. How could I not, with so much work to be done and so many problems only getting worse and so many threats looming that could kill us and...? I believed it would be irresponsible of me not to feel all that, all the time, and to put the weight of every potential misstep on my shoulders.

Of course (and it’s obvious now) that attitude was not only unhelpful but was actively counterproductive. The process of building a company is tough, but you only do yourself and the business harm by putting yourself through a constant mental and emotional wringer. Take care of yourself—physically and mentally—and be happy! Celebrate the wins, and enjoy the ride. It doesn’t make you unserious, it doesn’t mean you won’t work as hard, and it actually improves the company’s prospects.

It is not your job to “stay out of the way.” I’ll admit that this was a tough one for me to get right. It’s obvious (to most of us) that you can’t micromanage people, especially your direct reports who, by definition, have big titles and lead their own teams within the company. Because that is so widely accepted though, I think the easier mistake to make might be overcorrecting in the other direction and finding yourself out of the loop on too many important details. Personally, I had a hard time finding the right balance. Looking back, I should’ve worried less about stepping on toes and ended up staying more in the weeds (but only on important things).

If you hire the right people, you’ll have strong leaders reporting to you. If you’ve built the right management structure for feedback and communication, there will be a healthy dialogue among the team so you can adjust when needed. Trust your leaders to tell you when they need more space; otherwise, treat everything important like it’s still your problem (while knowing when and how to delegate).

It is not your job to obsess over other companies and feel that you always need to be #1 on every metric. Charlie Munger said it well: “Someone will always be getting richer faster than you. This is not a tragedy.” It’s always good to learn from others and to take best practices you find elsewhere to incorporate into your own business. But the idea that you need to grow faster, or hire more people, or raise more money just because everyone else seems to be doing that is misguided and will lead to bad decision-making.

Keep your focus on what you can control. If you can learn something from a competitor that helps your business get better, great. But the success of others doesn’t make you a failure—unless it distracts you from executing on your own vision.

It is not your job to make every hire work out. While it is your job to hire prudently, even the best companies in the world fall short of a 100% success rate. Hiring (and firing!) is expensive, and it makes good business sense to invest in your people and give everyone the best chance possible to be a superstar at your company.

But when it doesn’t work out (and sometimes it doesn’t) you should not view that outcome as a personal failing or a disastrous event to be avoided at all costs. Sometimes the right thing for the company and the employee is an amicable parting of ways, with a chance for both sides to look elsewhere and find a better mutual fit.

It is not your job to be loved by everyone all the time. Good thing too, because it's not going to happen. Being CEO isn't about being the most popular person all the time; in fact, the job requires things of you sometimes that will explicitly make you unpopular among some people for some period of time. That's ok, and you shouldn't take it personally.

Your duty is to the company and its shareholders broadly, and sometimes doing the right thing means creating a bit of tension and a few hurt feelings in the short term. A strong leader will earn the respect of their team by doing what is right, even when it is difficult or unpopular.

It is not your job to hide the ugly truth. It is not your job to never show weakness. And it is not your job to never be wrong. These all lead to the same point: you can aim for perfection but you'll never attain it. You will make mistakes as a leader. The company will always have areas where it is struggling. These are the natural conditions of life, and especially life at a startup!

You don't do yourself or your team any favors by trying to hide from reality. Yes, it is important to be a good cheerleader and keep team morale up. But the credibility you'll gain by admitting the truth (which everyone can usually see anyway), facing up to your and the company's failings, and being vulnerable in front of your team far outweighs any negative impact on morale. There is strength in admitting imperfection, and when the message from the top is that mistakes are okay as long as you own them and fix them, the company culture will become stronger.

If you're a founder looking for guidance on your company's next step, [talk to a partner at Scaleview Partners today.](#)



PARTNER

GABE WILCOX
(512) 675-3000

gabe@scaleviewpartners.com



PARTNER

JAY SNODGRASS
(512) 879-6464

jay@scaleviewpartners.com



PARTNER

JORDAN DAVIDSON
(512) 883-8000

jordan@scaleviewpartners.com



www.scaleviewpartners.com