

CEOS SET THE TONE FOR THE IMAGE OF THEIR ORGANISATION, AS WELL AS THE CULTURE OF THEIR ENTIRE WORKPLACE. WITH SO MUCH PRESSURE AT THE TOP, EXECUTIVE COACHING IS FAST BECOMING ONE OF THE MOST SOUGHT-AFTER RESOURCES TO HELP CEOS ADOPT THE TRAITS OF SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP. HERE, TWO OF THE TOP CEO COACHES ON THE ISLAND - **MARION GAMEL** FROM THE FUEL AND **NATHAN FARRUGIA** FROM VISTAGE - SHARE SOME OF THE TIPS AND INSIGHTS USUALLY RESERVED FOR THE TRAINING ROOMS OF THE BEST IN THE BUSINESS.

Should CEOs consider coaching beyond their company sphere

MARION

The relationship between a coach and his client is a relationship of equals. I don't believe it is ethical for a CEO to be coached by an internal coach who - ultimately - reports to him. There should be no taboos in coaching conversations; being coached by an external coach empowers the CEO to talk about any concerns or secret plans (about himself, the company or other employees), that possibly cannot be shared with an employee of the company. A CEO is the ultimate decision-maker and can sometimes feel isolated, so external coaching addresses that.

NATHAN

Sometimes a cliché but often a reality, 'it's lonely at the top' implies that there are few people that can truly understand the mindset of the CEO from within the business. It is often the case that the complexity of life in the top office means that the people around you have their own biases, so an external neutral observer with experience is often the best way to stay objective.

Generally, have you found there to be a connection between receiving coaching and achieving success as a CEO?

MARION

There must be a direct connection between being coached and achieving success, for any coaching process to work. It is also paramount that the CEO being coached is the one who defines what 'success' is, in terms of results, metrics, impact, or timeline, for example. In any coaching process (and this is not unique to coaching CEOs), the 'goals' of the person being coached must be precisely defined and prioritised early. The CEO's definition of success is the compass of all subsequent coaching conversations.

NATHAN

Yes, we clearly see that, both anecdotally and statistically, coached CEOs outperform those that try and muddle through alone. Even if you have a great team around you, or a very involved board of directors, you still need to develop personally. Typically, seeking a coach also means that you already have a growth mindset, which is, in itself, a direct attribution to success.

CEO coaching has rapidly become a high-value international industry estimated to be worth more than \$2 billion globally.

Leading the Leaders

Towards Success

Which aspect of their role do you find CEOs are most interested to develop or improve?

MARION

In my experience, the six aspects of CEOs' roles that tend to be most in focus during coaching are: communication; making hard decisions faster; leading the team during periods of change; putting the right processes in place as the company grows; attracting, empowering and retaining top talent; and deciding what to delegate and what to keep full control of.

NATHAN

The key to reaching top performance is self-awareness, as it unlocks potential already present in the individual. This is a quicker route to success than building skills from scratch. Ultimately, the self-aware leader is the most necessary starting point in order to determine what style of leadership your business needs, and to build resilience in your team.

What are the top things that a CEO should know to be effective in 2019?

MARION

Good leadership is timeless. The world around us changes fast due to globalisation and digitalisation, but the act of leading is based on key strengths and behaviours that are infinitely valuable. My three keywords for CEOs are always: awareness, agility and efficiency.

NATHAN

The most critical skill needed by any CEO is decision-making. Whether these are decisions about structure, investment, technology or people, the indecisive CEOs always struggle the most.

What have you found to be the common daily habits and routines of a successful CEO?

MARION

In my experience, outstanding CEOs tend to have their fingers on the pulse of their people, making time to listen to their team while remaining up-to-date on the business side too. Great CEOs 'walk the floor' regularly and start meaningful conversations with their employees, since they know that a happy and motivated workforce means results. They tend to answer emails promptly, and usually with a single 'Yes' or 'No', turning anything longer into a face-to-face conversation because they know the power of interaction. Lastly, a successful CEO has a rich personal life, and is protective about it. They do what it takes to look after their health, and they know that the stress of the job needs to be balanced by time spent relaxing amongst supportive family and friends.

NATHAN

Many are 'trying to do too much' and not focussing on their value. We all have 24 hours in a day, yet some manage to do far more than others. It's not about time management, but time effectiveness. We ask CEOs what things they do that add most long-term value to their business and life, and focus on those. The great routines and habits are the ones that include a balance of early-morning personal physical and mental training, effective communication and clarity to the team (morning 'huddles'), effective decision-making on medium-to-long term strategies, quiet thinking time, networking and building social capital with the team and external stakeholders, and learning and reflecting on their impact at the end of the day. All great CEOs also find quality time to spend with loved ones.





What steps do you take to help your clients navigate the many challenges and pressures of their role?

MARION

First and foremost, my coaching approach is strength-based, so that the CEO's individual strengths provide the foundation of the coaching sessions. The CEO is then asked to describe his goals to help him achieve a positive 'winning' mindset and envisage a bright future. After discussing the differences that may exist between today's reality and tomorrow's ambitions, we establish a learning plan to tackle these differences, by monitoring progress, refining and tweaking until the CEO is confident that he is truly on the path to achieving his ambitious goals.

NATHAN

We encourage regular one-to-one coaching as well as peer development through our group sessions. This allows them to understand their roles by discussing with other top performers, as well as realise that many others face the same day-to-day issues. Peer learning is a very useful tool that is sadly lacking in Malta. We tend to keep our problems to ourselves for too long, when they could be resolved quickly in a confidential and trusting environment. Our groups helping our members grow faster than average, through guidance and empathy.

How do you help CEOs to stay motivated?

MARION

I use a strength-based step-by-step approach to remind CEOs of their skills, attributes, unique capabilities and outstanding successes. Being aware of what you have achieved is very empowering. By understanding their own strengths and the world around them, and focusing on their new goals, CEOs realise that they can, once again, aim incredibly high with confidence.

NATHAN

By helping them understand their 'ikigai' - their reason to get out of bed in the morning. As we rise towards self-realisation, money becomes less important. We need to be continuously-conscious of our state of mind to stay on track. That is where we find our most effective use as coaches. Although this may sound like 'life coaching', we are business coaches and always focus on the individual within a business context. The life improvement and benefits of balance are a contributor to success.

How and when do you recommend CEOs start planning for their succession?

MARION

It's never too soon to plan your succession as a CEO. I would even go as far as saying that, after a CEO's probation period is over, waiting or failing to plan your succession is unprofessional. However, succession planning goes hand-in-hand with talent. It's not about appointing the 'least bad' of your management team to take over! If a CEO truly cares about the company he is temporarily in charge of, he will forget his personal insecurities to the benefit of flawless transition between him and the next leader.

NATHAN

Every person you recruit should be looked at for their next role, or indeed a few thereon. Succession isn't just for the CEO but for the whole organisation. A good CEO has a choice of potential successors from within the organisation, not just one. Their development should be continuous, allowing a significant portion of their time to be spent on growing their technical and leadership skills, and being stretched outside of their comfort zone at every opportunity. ●