

CareerSmart Advisor™

Strategies & Solutions for Your Career Success

A Note From Dave

As we are all acutely aware, the stock market has been behaving like something you could only find at Six Flags. I don't know about you, but it really is pretty tough to stay optimistic. ExecuNet doesn't have any deeper insights into the future than anyone else, but our monthly surveys of the executive marketplace say the sky is not yet falling. Based on our monthly Executive Employment Outlook and Recruiter Confidence Index, we still appear to be in pretty decent shape.



On the executive side, which tends to be more conservative than the recruiting world, 46 percent were confident or very confident that the market for executives would improve over the next six months — up 14 points from a year ago and 8 points higher than July. When we asked the recruiters the same question, 69 percent were confident regarding the executive employment outlook for the next six months. And while they were not up quite as much month-over-month as the execs were, they were still up 2 points from the July survey.

The two monthly surveys I am citing here are not the only way in which we attempt to take the economic temperature; but over the years they have turned out to be pretty good indicators, and we have no reason to think they will not continue to be. So for now anyway, we are still, as they say, bullish.

More monthly trend information can be found at http://www.execunet.com/e_trends.cfm

Sincerely,

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

The Firing Process

By Marji McClure

For an executive, creating a solid team behind him or her is perhaps one of the greatest challenges. The road to building a roster of A-players is smooth when acquiring new members to join the team. But it becomes rather bumpy — and uncomfortable for some — when one of those team members needs to be fired. Firing an employee is undoubtedly not the easiest task leaders face, but it has to be done right. How you approach firing tactics can really define your success or failure as a leader. How you approach it if you are the one who is fired is also key to future career successes.

Sharpen Your Communication and Overall Leadership Skills

Strong leaders have to be strong communicators. This is a general rule for all aspects of leading a business, including the ability to fire their subordinates. But oftentimes, when they are dissatisfied with an individual's performance, they fail to convey their concerns to that particular employee. Then, when the individual is asked to leave the company, he is truly surprised.

"One of the least developed 'muscles' is the ability to confront each other when difficult emotions are involved," says Judith Glaser, author of *The DNA of Leadership* and CEO of Benchmark Communications Inc. "So we talk it out with others, even vent our frustrations to people who may know some of the details and in doing so we feel we have 'talked it out' adequately — however the person in question is out of the loop and gains no benefit of insight or impulse to change their behaviors."

If you don't fire someone who clearly needs to exit the company, your authority and, ultimately, your future with your organization could also be in jeopardy. Chances are others in the company notice that this person must be dismissed — and that you are not solving the problem. Keep in mind that morale among that individual's colleagues will diminish if nothing happens, says Cheryl Alexis, a senior HR executive and consultant and ExecuNet member.

"They know that Sue is not carrying her weight and they often have to pick up the slack," says Alexis. "They will become increasingly resentful and angry, and turnover can easily result. Then, the manager will be left with the under-performers, while the high-performers seek employment elsewhere. That's a worse situation than facing and dealing with the problem."

Continued on page 4

FastTrack Programs
September/October 2007
Hosted by Dave Opton,
founder and CEO, ExecuNet

- 9/19 — **How to Land the Job You Want When You are Over 50** — Jean Walker
- 9/20 — **Future Intelligence** — Eric Garland
- 9/27 — **Establishing Real Relationships With Recruiters** — David Dart
- 10/5 — **Dealing With Your Digital Dirt** — Robyn Greenspan
- 10/11 — **Becoming a Conflict Competent Leader** — Craig Runde & Tim Flanagan
- 10/12 — **FREE PROGRAM FOR MEMBERS** — **What I Want My Recruiter to Know That My Résumé Won't Tell Them** — David Dart
- 10/17 — **How to Land the Job You Want When You are Over 50** — Jean Walker
- 10/19 — **FREE PROGRAM FOR MEMBERS** — **Get Visible: Marketing Yourself on the Internet** — Karen Armon
- 10/26 — **FREE PROGRAM FOR MEMBERS** — **Management vs. Leadership** — Jean Walker

Register today to guarantee your participation in the programs of your choice! Call ExecuNet's Member Services at 800-637-3126 or visit www.execunet.com/fasttrack

Networking Meetings
September 2007
Hosted by ExecuNet Facilitators

- 9/17 — **Boston Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Pam Lassiter
- 9/18 — **Wilmington** — Russ Dunn & Rick Hays
- 9/18 — **Irvine (Orange County)** — Mark James
- 9/18 — **Hartford** — Howard S. Bader
- 9/18 — **Cleveland** — Rick Taylor
- 9/18 — **Houston** — Michael J. Grove
- 9/19 — **Charlotte** — Merton Marsh & Michael Hall
- 9/20 — **Pittsburgh/Cranberry Township** — Vince Papi
- 9/20 — **Seattle** — Susan Stringer
- 9/20 — **Washington, DC** — Peter McCarthy
- 9/20 — **Minneapolis** — John Wetzel & Barbara Johnson
- 9/20 — **Princeton/East Brunswick** — Rod Colon
- 9/20 — **Columbia, MD** — Ed Loucks
- 9/20 — **Palo Alto** — Linda Holroyd
- 9/24 — **Raleigh/Durham** — Stuart Levine
- 9/25 — **Chicago** — Melody Camp
- 9/25 — **Washington, DC Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Peter McCarthy
- 9/26 — **Toronto** — Martin Buckland
- 9/26 — **Denver** — Karen Armon
- 9/27 — **Dallas** — Bob Hueglin
- 9/27 — **Columbus, OH** — Janine Moon
- 9/27 — **Toronto Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Martin Buckland
- 9/27 — **Atlanta** — J. Patrick Haly
- 9/28 — **St. Louis** — Bill Severson & Cyd Dodson
- 9/28 — **Detroit Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Marge Larsen

Registration information can be found at members.execunet.com/e_network_results.cfm

Insider Insight

How “Doing Good in Society” Increases Your Competitive Edge

By Samantha Taylor

Corporate responsibility is dominating today's business headlines and can no longer be pushed aside or postponed.

Advancing society's interests is influencing investment decisions globally due to the increasing power of consumers and employees advocating for their favorite brands to demonstrate and be held accountable for their contribution to the community.

Against the backdrop of our lowest trust environment ever, caused by a polarized political climate, disturbing world events, untrustworthy social and business practices, companies are being further impacted in an already-challenging operating environment — creating a “show and prove it” to me marketplace among key stakeholders.

Building Trust in a Low-Trust Environment

According to research conducted by Gallup International, 62 percent of people around the world do not trust large national or global companies to operate in society's interest. As a result, you are probably being bombarded with multiple issues that need to be addressed, including compliance, governance, the environment, labor rights and diversity. In addition, you are probably being asked to provide responsible products and services, to demonstrate accountability for charitable contributions, implement corporate responsibility-driven stakeholder marketing, as well as healthier returns for investors.

Corporate social responsibility, now a \$31.7 billion services market, is the evolution of a management paradigm, which should be at the forefront of your

corporate agenda, and a key component for safeguarding your company's reputation and business operations.

Adopting Social Responsibility as Strategy

Being “socially conscious” is proving to be a powerful way for you to address the issue of declining low trust among stakeholders. As a result, an increasing number of senior-level executives are about to, or are currently, utilizing corporate social responsibility initiatives to protect and grow their businesses. Additionally, many companies are extending existing or creating new job functions to include chief ethics, compliance and responsibility officers.

Research conducted by Business Social Responsibility demonstrates that 94 percent of executives expect social responsibility to have a greater impact on strategy in the next five years, and 68 percent agreed it would be tied to business success in the future.

However, from the outset, it is important that you adopt the right approach toward establishing sustaining, long-term programs. Some companies have been quick to postpone costs and others are flocking to the cause with fragmented approaches that can lead to consequences down the road. For example, it is important to have a handle on all your departmental philanthropic and sponsorship costs, properly assess and measure expenditures to see how your initiatives have impacted your brand performance, products and services, and stakeholder liaisons. Furthermore, just because you give generously to local charitable organizations does not necessarily mean that you are an exemplary citizen, if the environmental effects are

Continued on page 3

Insider Insight

Continued from page 2

ignored or you have human rights issues.

If you properly advocate for, and are aligned with, causes that benefit society, you will mitigate reputation risk and harm to your business, people and environment. Also, they will enhance competitive edge, sell more products, recruit first-rate talent and boost performance.

Over the last year, some popular causes that companies have been supporting include the environment, nutrition, workplace diversity, HIV/AIDS and economic development. All of these still present great opportunities for alignment, depending on your company value proposition, but there are plenty of other causes out there to advance the public's interests. Some suggestions include literacy, arts and culture, education and wellness. There are several tools available to help you find charities that match your brand. For example, Charity Navigator is a great resource.

Companies "Doing Good"

The following examples are well-known companies who are engaged in successful programs and have demonstrated their commitment to society.

Microsoft, recently ranked number one by a Harris Interactive/*Wall Street Journal* survey of the world's best and worst corporate reputations, has been "bridging the digital divide" providing technology in third-world countries, as well as accommodating disabled workers.

Google encourages its engineers to devote 20 percent of their hours to independent projects.

Patagonia's 2006-07 environmental campaign is devoted to the oceans, closing the connection between the vitality of human life and the marine environment, along with contribution to The Marine Fish Conservation Network.

Companies "Doing Not so Good"

On the flipside, the following are examples of companies that have suffered reputation and cost consequences.

Hewlett Packard had to pay \$145 million to settle civil charges associated with the board information leak investigations.

Halliburton was accused of using

Samantha Taylor, founder and principal of Reputation Dynamics (Reputation-Dynamics.com), brings more than 15 years of experience building national to global companies and their reputations, having worked in both agency leadership and corporate marketing roles. Sam works with for-profit and not-for-profit companies on reputation management programs, as well as alignment with social causes for the lifestyle, professional and financial services sectors. She can be reached at (212) 979-6092 or sam@staylorassoc.com

political connections to profit from the war in Iraq and overcharging the U.S. government.

According to KLD, more than 100 cases of improper backdating of stock options are under investigation by the SEC and others; examples include Autodesk and Coherent.

It is hard to turn the paper these days without witnessing another new company under scrutiny or at the early stages of an investigation. As a result, senior-level executives are on the hook to provide even greater transparency and responsiveness for their actions to key stakeholders.

Following are some suggested steps to take to help you evaluate, create and implement sustaining, social responsibility programs that address society's interests and market dynamics.

Ask Yourself the Important Questions

As a first step, take a look at your current programs and determine what results or impact they have had. Build a holistic program that supports your value proposition and addresses the following fundamental questions:

- How will my company properly contribute to the community to advance public interest?
- What impact will this have on our reputation, stakeholders and performance?
- How will we demonstrate and prove our commitment to society?
- How can we be accountable for our actions and operations?
- How can we integrate our programs with business performance and gain a competitive edge?

System-Wide Responsibility

Make social responsibility a priority within your management and top-to-bottom in the organization, integrated and cross-

functional with all marketing, business operations and stakeholder marketing liaisons.

Performance Evaluation

It is critical that you assess and benchmark the cost and impact of current cause-related marketing, sponsorship and philanthropic activities happening in the company, both locally and internationally. Once you have this analysis, you will be able to properly evaluate their successes and determine new strategies.

Choosing a Social Cause

Remember employees and customers are king! You need to poll them and listen to their perspective on what causes they are most interested in and would like your company to advocate for on their behalf. Listening to key stakeholders can build a more productive workforce and positively influence consumer affinity and behaviors.

Narrowing the Divide with Charities

Aside from monetary donations, our charities need your valuable resources and support. Ensure the proper selection, collaboration and integration with the existing and/or new not-for-profit to mutually advance causes and engage them in community-driven education campaigns.

Benchmarking and Performance

Dedicate a portion of the company's budget for social purpose investment and incorporate into the performance targets and measures of executives with P&L responsibility. Integrate sponsorship and philanthropic contributions under the social responsibility umbrella. Establish incentives for employees to act as good corporate citizens on behalf of your company. This will be a very motivating factor for employee performance.

Continued on page 8

Firing Process

Continued from page 1

Not tying the termination to the strategic imperative of the company can also haunt an executive who delays a firing. “If a company is in a turnaround situation, then quick decisions need to be made, says Dr. Laurence J. Stybel, co-founder of Mass.-based consulting firm Stybel Peabody Inc. “Employees don’t expect that the company will treat them fairly or with generosity. But if the strategic imperative is ‘good to great,’ then terminating employees in ways that will be perceived by remaining employees as treating employees like refuse is inconsistent with the good to great theme, and result in serious secondary consequences with customers, potential acquisitions and remaining employees.”

There could also be legal issues if the problem — and firing — is avoided for a long period of time. Notes George L. Lenard, managing partner with Harris Dowell Fisher & Harris, L.C. and editor of *George’s Employment Blawg*: “If one has tolerated performance problems for a long time, it becomes less convincing that these problems were the true reason for termination.” In this case, Lenard says to expect an attorney to ask questions like: Isn’t it true she’d be doing that for at least three years? So why did you finally decide to fire her a week after she filed a sexual harassment charge? Coincidence?

Covering Your Bases

It’s important that your firing practices are organized and structured, not just to avoid potential litigation, but to ensure the firing is done properly and compassionately. First of all, make sure that your reasons for a firing are well-documented.

“Documentation is paramount,” says Martin McDonough, president of MEI Solutions and an ExecuNet member. “Regardless of state class (at-will, etc.), I find that documentation is best kept in all situations. Solid documentation will allow an executive review as well as provide a documentation ‘trail’ for actions and corrective counseling if and when a discharge is necessary.”

If You’re Fired

Most times, when individuals are fired, the news is surprising and shocking. In her book *I Didn’t See It Coming: The Only Book You’ll Ever Need to Avoid Being Blindsided in Business*, author and speaker Nancy Widmann offers these guidelines for what to do in the moments after being told you are fired.

- Don’t ever agree to give up your chair (office) immediately. Insist that you keep coming in while you are working out your deal. It is tough, but do it.
- Call a lawyer who specializes in employment agreements. Don’t sign anything until your lawyer has reviewed and approved it.
- Don’t be bullied. Despite what your boss or HR tries to tell you, nothing needs to be signed by the end of the day. There is always time.
- Never accept the first severance offer. There is usually room for negotiation and your company can always do better.
- Make sure you and your boss agree on the story of your departure. Insist that you have a chance to address your team or staff before anyone else talks to them.
- Get veto power over press releases or announcements inside and outside the company. If none is to be issued, you can always ask that your boss and HR say that you are leaving to explore other opportunities. This gives you plenty to cover. Never say that you are leaving to spend more time with your family. It has become a joke.
- Never assign blame and always avoid gossip. Remember the business world is small and you never know when you’ll find yourself sitting across the desk from a former boss or colleague.
- Keep it together. It’s in your best interest to remain poised and appear confident at all times.

This is especially important to avoid any possible litigation due to alleged discrimination (such as age, race and sex). “And even when a white male under 40 is involved, how he is treated may later be compared to how minority employees in similar circumstances are treated — consistency is the name of the game — so it is best to have good reasons,” says Lenard. “As to documentation, credibility suffers if the employer complains about having had problems with an employee for a long time, yet the personnel file is devoid of any criticism or discipline. The only thing plaintiffs’ employment lawyers like better than that is a case in which the file is full of complimentary performance evaluations.”

What are some key legal mistakes executives make during the firing process? “Telling them too much about the reasons. Telling them too little about the reasons,” says Lenard. “The former risks saying something that will be used against you later, whether quoted accurately or twisted to suit the employee’s case. The latter, especially giving no reason at all or a flimsy, feel-good reason, encourages litigation by raising suspicions. The key to

a discrimination case is ‘pretext,’ giving a reason other than the true one. Often, this is done not because of discrimination, but to avoid hurting feelings. But untrue is untrue, and a good lawyer will bring that out and suggest the true reason was an illegal one.”

Overcoming the Fear

Regardless of the reasons for a termination, the thought of telling someone that he or she is fired can be very uncomfortable for many leaders. But there are approaches that can help make the conversation easier on both the deliverer of the news and the recipient. Shelle Rose Charvet, president of Success Strategies and author of *Words that Change Minds: Mastering the Language of Influence and Presenting Ideas to Skeptical People*, suggests using “The Bad News Formula,” which helps people deliver bad news while minimizing the negative emotional impact on the person they are addressing. It begins with the delivery of bad news followed by the word “but”, three pieces of good news and the word “and” between each bit of good news.

Continued on page 5

Firing Process

Continued from page 4

Rose Charvet offers the following example: “As you know, there have been problems with your work, Carol, and unfortunately we are letting you go, effective immediately. BUT we have a package that I think you’ll find more than fair, AND it will give you the time you need to think about what you want to do next AND I suspect you’ll be able to use the time quite well to sort out your next moves.”

Researching such conversations can also help. “Practice what you are going to say and have a plan,” says HR consultant Susan Kotulsky. “If you think it is intimidating on your end, imagine how the employee feels on their end. When you are further along in your career, you are expected to be able to handle difficult conversations with tact and diplomacy. In my experience, handling the situation with sincere compassion and empathy is a skill worth developing.”

If anything, make sure that your employee knows that your conversation isn’t a warning and that you are announcing a separation between him and the company. “The number one mistake people make in an attempt to not deliver terrible news is that they don’t say the actual sentence, ‘You are fired,’” says Nancy Widmann, co-author of *I Didn’t See It Coming: The Only Book You’ll Ever Need to Avoid Being Blindsided in Business*.

“I had a case at CBS where a salesperson tried to fire his assistant and didn’t quite say the word ‘fired’ and she showed up the next day saying that she thought it was something they could work out.”

If you’re not sure exactly what to say, keep it simple, advises Peggy Krynicki, interim VP of HR for Newegg.com and an ExecuNet member. “A termination really shouldn’t take more than 10 to 15 minutes, but the wording should be simple: ‘Based on _____, the company has elected to terminate your employment effective today.’ Don’t negotiate, don’t argue,” says Krynicki, who also stresses the importance of considering the feelings of the fired individual. “Allow the person

A Termination Checklist

When preparing to fire an employee, it’s important to have documentation regarding the reasons behind the dismissal. Then, when the employee is told, it’s just as vital to remember to disable his computer access and obtain his key to the building. But there’s definitely more. Michael Hawn, MBA, SPHR, an HR director and ExecuNet member, suggests following these guidelines:

- ✓ Have clear communication of expectations and policies, with a signed receipt for a handbook-type document and candid appraisal systems.
- ✓ Have progressive disciplinary systems with a clear record of violation, expectations and possible future consequences.
- ✓ Always be private, and almost always have a witness that is appropriate from the individual’s management chain.
- ✓ After an apparent serious violation or possible final offense, suspend pending investigations to avoid rash decisions or emotional mistakes.
- ✓ Be clear and to-the-point when presenting the information.
- ✓ If management has made a decision, do not give the employee the appearance of an opportunity to debate.
- ✓ Obtain keys, cell phone, computer, etc. before they leave the premises and remember passwords, gate codes and access that may need to be changed.
- ✓ If termination is for reduction in force or job elimination, give full support available by policy and clear communication of outplacement services, severance, COBRA assistance and unemployment in writing, with a personal HR contact for follow-up questions and/or problems.
- ✓ When general severance is given, include appropriate hold harmless language in the agreement.
- ✓ Position your HR department so that no termination can take place in the group you represent without your involvement and your approval.

dignity,” she adds. “At times, I give the person some room and have them elect how they would prefer to exit (although I won’t let people go back and say goodbye to everyone in the building). Sometimes, if the person wants to position it that they have elected the action, I let them.”

If the entire process is still intimidating, ask for help. If their company has an HR department, executives should tap into the individuals in that part of the business for support. Having processes in place before a firing even occurs is also a good idea. “Firing ‘with minimum damage to morale’ can be lessened if the organization has put in place HR policies that address the issues of termination,” says Martha Zukowski, an HR professional and ExecuNet member. “The HR executive would be wise to have policies in place that include tenure, golden parachutes, severance pay, outplacement services and career counseling.”

Sometimes it helps to have a process that actually helps employees recognize that their firing is the right thing to do.

“The most effective terminations I have had usually include a self-assessment that validates that the requirements have not been met,” says ExecuNet member Diane Gallo. “We get there through counseling over time, questioning about specifics and ultimately the admission of the employee that they have left me and the company no choice but to sever their employment. It is always a tough conversation, but over the years I have found that helping the person who is being terminated for performance ‘own’ the shortfall goes a long way toward healing the situation.”

When It’s You

If you are the one who is fired, it’s important to immediately start positioning yourself for a new role. Lenard suggests trying to negotiate a resignation and a reference; “a neutral official reference and, if possible, a positive reference from someone who may be supportive and feel bad about what happened,” says Lenard, who also suggests asking for severance pay,

Continued on page 8

Your Career Advisor

Conflict Competence Makes Leaders More Effective and More Promotable

By Craig Runde and
Tim Flanagan

Conflict in the workplace is as inevitable as sunshine in July on Miami Beach. If you take a few precautions like wearing sunscreen, you can prevent getting a painful sunburn and enjoy a relaxing day at the beach. We believe the same is true when encountering conflict — if you make some good choices, you can avoid getting burned and actually experience some benefits that can result from conflict (like increased creativity and better decision-making). We assert that the way in which leaders handle conflict can lead to outcomes that are more successful, creative and satisfying than imagined. In fact, there is a strong link between a leader's ability to handle conflict effectively and his or her effectiveness and "promotability" in the organization.

In a study completed recently at the Leadership Development Institute at Eckerd College, a strong correlation was found between specific conflict resolution behaviors and perceived leadership effectiveness as well as suitability for promotion. The study consisted of over 300 participants, most of whom were middle-level or higher managers in corporate, government and nonprofit organizations. Each participant completed the Conflict Dynamics Profile, an assessment instrument that provides feedback about the ways people behave when faced with conflict at work. It helps people discover the kinds of behaviors they use that are effective as well as those that tend to enflame or prolong conflict.

The instrument looks at a series of constructive behaviors (perspective-taking, creating solutions, expressing emotions, reaching out, reflective thinking, delay responding and adapting) that tend to reduce tension and lead to improved conflict resolutions. It also looks at a set of destructive behaviors (largely fight-

or flight-type responses like winning at all costs, displaying anger, demeaning others, retaliating, avoiding, yielding, hiding emotions and self-criticizing) that tend to enflame and prolong conflicts.

In addition to completing the instrument themselves, the participants also had their boss, peers and direct reports respond to a similar questionnaire that asked how often the individual displayed various behaviors. These respondents were given an additional survey that asked about the individual's leadership effectiveness and their suitability for promotion. The results of the surveys were correlated and analyzed.

“

One of the keys to creating solutions is to engage one's conflict partner so the ideas are developed jointly, not independently.

”

The results suggested that certain constructive behaviors were most strongly correlated with being seen as an effective leader. Specifically, active constructive behaviors including perspective-taking, creating solutions, expressing emotions and reaching out were strongly associated with effective leadership and promotability.

Given the results of the study, leaders who engage in the following "constructive" behaviors, especially when handling conflict, will find that others perceive them to be more effective and more promotable:

Perspective-Taking

This involves putting oneself in the other person's position and seeing the issue

from their point-of-view. This must be done well enough that the other person believes that a genuine attempt to understand is being made. The most successful at this are those who understand not only the "facts" or the information in question, but also the emotions involved. Effectively understanding emotions requires the practice of empathy.

Creating Solutions

This constructive behavior includes asking questions, suggesting alternatives, exploring options, brainstorming and working collaboratively to generate solutions or identify potential outcomes. One of the keys to creating solutions is to engage one's conflict partner so the ideas are developed jointly, not independently.

Expressing Emotions

This means talking honestly with the other person about one's thoughts and feelings. Often during conflict, one party or the other withholds genuine emotions, points-of-view or information under the pretense of protecting oneself or one's conflict partner. The most successful resolutions to conflict involve honest, genuine sharing.

Reaching Out

Outreach often involves making the first move to make amends during or after a difficult conflict interaction. An apology may be involved when necessary. More importantly, reaching out is the action one takes to insure that the parties do not avoid interacting due to a conflict or assume that time has healed or will heal the conflict.

Destructive Behaviors

In addition to suggesting that these kinds of behaviors make one more effective and promotable, the study also demonstrated that certain behaviors were associated with ineffectiveness and reduced

[Continued on page 7](#)

Your Career Advisor
Continued from page 6

promotability. In the language of the Conflict Dynamics Profile, such behaviors are labeled “destructive.”

Leaders who are viewed as winning at all costs are seen as less effective and less likely candidates for promotion. Leaders who tend to display anger or demean others are perceived in equally ineffective ways. And those who retaliate, even passively, are also seen as very ineffective and less likely to be promoted.



The key outcome is that if you want your boss to see you as an effective leader you should deal with conflict rather than avoid it, and you should use constructive behaviors when you do so.



In each of these cases, winning at all costs, displaying anger, demeaning others and retaliating, it seems relatively easy to understand why others would perceive such leaders as ineffective. Remarkably though, we routinely encounter leaders who choose to behave in these ineffective ways.

In many instances, the remedy includes participating in an assessment process using the Conflict Dynamics Profile or other 360-degree instrument.

Craig Runde is the director of New Program Development at the Eckerd College Leadership Development Institute (LDI) and can be reached at rundece@eckerd.edu.

Tim Flanagan is the director of Custom Programs at LDI and can be reached at flanagta@eckerd.edu. They are co-authors of *Becoming a Conflict Competent Leader* co-published by Jossey-Bass and the Center for Creative Leadership in 2006.

A New ExecuNet Event!

Becoming a Conflict Competent Leader: How You and Your Organization Can Manage Conflict Effectively

Conflict is at the root of some of our best ideas.

As much as we'd like to avoid it, conflict will exist whether your workplace is a Fortune 500 company or a small family-owned business. As a leader, it is up to you to harness the opportunities that conflict presents, as well as avoid the damage it can cause.

While conflict can dramatically impact human resources and the bottom line, it can also serve as a catalyst for new ideas and creative solutions to challenging business issues. Led by authors Craig Runde & Tim Flanagan, this 90-minute program will give you powerful insights on:

- Becoming a stronger leader by turning conflict into strategy
- The financial and organizational benefits of effectively handling conflict
- Increasing your personal dynamic by being “conflict competent”
- Strengthening your capabilities through challenge
- And much, much more!

FREE BONUS

You'll also receive the book, *Becoming a Conflict Competent Leader* (a \$2995 value) by Craig E. Runde and Tim A. Flanagan, when you register to attend this program.

This FastTrack program will be presented on Thursday, October 11, 2007, 1:00 to 2:30 PM ET. Registration information for this program can be found at www.execunet.com/fasttrack

In the absence of feedback, many leaders simply don't understand the impact of their behavior on others.

The same holds true for people who avoid conflict, the ones who prefer flight to fight. In fact, in the study, bosses perceived conflict avoidance to be even less effective in leadership roles than active destructive behaviors. The key outcome is that if you want your boss to see you as an effective leader you should deal with conflict rather than avoid it, and you should use constructive behaviors when you do so.

Effective Leaders Handle Conflict Effectively

Those who do so are likely to be seen as having what it takes to be promoted. But responding to conflict is hard work. As demonstrated in the description of what it takes to reach out, it may require a healthy dose of humility. It may cause

one to reconsider the possibility that “my way is not the only way” during the practice of perspective-taking. One may have to endure the discomfort of personal vulnerability when revealing thoughts or feelings associated with expressing emotions. And one may have to alter their preferred way of thinking in order to embrace the novelty of different ideas when creating solutions with a conflict partner.

As we note in our book, *Becoming a Conflict Competent Leader*, no one can be perfectly conflict-competent 100 percent of the time, just as visitors to Miami Beach in July are seldom 100 percent effective in preventing sunburn. Most have learned to apply sunscreen, limit their time in the direct sun, wear hats, hydrate, etc., to limit the danger and enjoy the environment.

Similarly, leaders can strive to be consistently more effective by practicing the behaviors we've described above. Sure, once in a while you'll get burned by conflict. But those who can handle the heat by practicing constructive conflict behaviors will not only prevent pain, they will enjoy the view from the top as they are sought out for their skills and promoted to that window office with a view of the beach! ■

Firing Process

Continued from page 5

résumé writing and other outplacement services in exchange for a legal release.

“Describing a termination as a resignation is a ‘little white lie’ that is quite common, which is not to endorse it as morally right or legally appropriate in all circumstances. But in some cases, companies will actually offer it up-front as an option.

(‘Look, I think we both know you’ve really been struggling and subject to a lot of criticism from your boss. It might be in everyone’s best interest if you left.’) I would not endorse it for serious misconduct, but [instead] for poor performance or personality clash/bad fit issues.”

Alexis suggests immediately consulting with an attorney and sharing documents such as an employment contract, employee handbook and performance evaluations. Seek out professional associations, such as NEHRA (Northeast Human Resources Association) too, adds Alexis.

There shouldn’t be as immediate a need to accept the first job opportunity that comes along. Alexis says executives

Expert Resources:

- Judith Glaser, Benchmark Communications Inc. (BenchmarkCommunicationsInc.com)
- George L. Lenard, George’s Employment Blawg (EmploymentBlawg.com)
- Shelle Rose Charvet, Success Strategies (Successstrategies.com); WordsThatChangeMinds.com)
- Dr. Laurence J. Stybel, Stybel Peabody Lincolnshire (StybelPeabody.com)

should take the time to process what went wrong and re-assess their goals.

“The major difference in job search strategies between being fired and resigning is that, in the former situation, one must often work through anger, disappointment and embarrassment, then carefully prepare to answer the question why he or she is no longer with his/her current employer,” says Alexis. “I thought I was ready for the question of why I was no longer at my former employer, but I found myself getting upset during interviews and straying from my script until I took the time (weeks, in my case) to sort through my anger and rehearse my response. I think it’s much easier when you make the decision, as opposed to someone forcing their decision on you. It takes longer to recover emotionally when you’re in the latter situation and you must allow for that.”

While you may not want to talk

about why you left your previous company during your job search, it’s important to tell recruiters and search firms the truth, says Alexis. “They cannot be surprised with information or they will not trust or work with the person again. The executive should work with a job coach or career consultant to help him script out his response to the very tough question asked by hiring managers, ‘Why are you no longer with ABC?’ While you do not have to share all of the ugly facts, you can never lie. You have to find an objective, truthful way to explain your departure that casts you in as favorable a light as possible. For example, you might say that you and your manager had very different work styles, or that your new manager wanted to build his own team.” Eventually, this conversation will become easier and you will be on your way to a new position. ■

Insider Insight

Continued from page 3

Show Me

Rather than just creating PR buzz for the sake of it, be sure to generate good news about good deeds. Ensure that you clearly demonstrate your commitment, objectives, alignment with the social cause partners and expected contributions. Post

regular updates about your activities, as well as case studies to show how you are advancing public interest. In addition to the media, ensure that you are communicating your efforts and successes to employees and customers.

A Final Word

If you don’t act now and adopt social responsibility strategies, you will be left

behind. Integrating business and societal values is a powerful way to collaboratively innovate your value proposition, workforce and business focus. Taking the time and discipline to build sustaining, long-term programs and practices will provide considerable advantages for your brand’s reputation, improve trust and competitive edge for your company. ■

CareerSmart Advisor

Strategies & Solutions for Your Career Success

Founder & CEO: David Opton

Executive Editor: Lauryn Franzoni

Senior Editor: Robyn Greenspan

Contributing Editor: Marji McClure

Copy Editor: Carol Hamilton

Layout/Design: 5050Design.com

A biweekly publication of ExecuNet, the premier executive job, career and networking organization for senior level executives with salaries in excess of \$100,000.

ExecuNet
295 Westport Avenue
Norwalk, CT 06851
Phone: (800) 637-3126
E-mail: info@execunet.com



© All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying and recording, or otherwise without the prior written consent of ExecuNet.

www.execunet.com