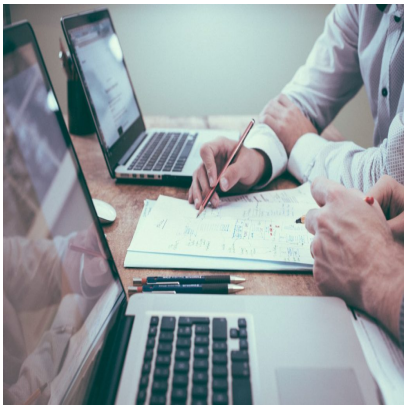

Strong Leaders Know When to Seek Outside Help

Description

Who is your biggest competitor? This is a question I ask when a business comes to me seeking assistance in improving their performance. The most common answer I hear is a little counterintuitive. Often the main competitor is not another company, but a mindset: people thinking they can do it on their own.

How many times does a plumber, electrician, carpenter, or roofer get called in to fix something because someone thought they could do it on their ownâ??but ended up making the problem worse? I often share stories of some of my own â??cost-savingâ?• ideas that ended up costing a lot of money!

For 15 years as founder of Studer Group, I met with executives of hospitals, medical groups, and so forth who wanted to be better at providing a good patient experience, employee engagement, physician engagement, accountability, etc. They realized that the lack of performance in the areas in question was costing the organization in lawsuits, overtime, reputation, and loss of talent, including physicians. When we covered what we learned and gave recommendations, which often included getting outside help, at least one person in the meeting would say (or at least imply with their questions and comments), â??We can do this on our own.â?• Many times, the president then would interject, â??If we can do this ourselves, then why have we not been doing it?â?•

It takes self-awareness and courage to say, â??I need help.â?• At times the staff do not want to admit to the leader that this is the case. Also, at times, the *leader* doesnâ??t want to admit it. Ego is the enemy of humility, and humility is a crucial leadership trait. When we lead with humility, we donâ??t mind seeking the input of othersâ??we realize that in an incredibly complex world there is no way one person can know it all. Seeking help is a strength, not a weakness.

Of course, the first step in seeking help is knowing one has an issue to solve. The organizations that called on us typically measured key items. That is why they knew where they were performing well and where they were not. Yet I find that measurement is often lacking in companies and cities. This needs to change.

Today in my work with communities, it is neat to see that the best ones tend to do more measuring. Recently, Fort Walton Beach, Florida, and Odessa, Texas, had Mason-Dixon Polling & Strategy

conduct quality of life surveys. In both cases, the results showed many areas of strength and pointed out a few opportunities. There are usually no surprises; what is noted is to what degree people feel a certain way.

After we get the results, the key then is getting help. This means admitting we have not been able to achieve what we would like even with our best efforts. We came to this understanding recently with the Studer Family of Companies in the area of more diversity in upper management. Over the years, we have worked hard to have the workforce match the community racially. We make sure all our projects follow a Covenant for the Community, which means 70 percent of all construction labor is local. We provide lots of training and development. Yet while we have done well in diversity in some areas, we have not done well in racial diversity in the management ranks. When we reached the conclusion that we need help, we brought in a company that specializes in helping organizations in diversity and inclusion.

Here are some tips:

1. Measure. Take time and spend money to make sure you have the right measurement tools in place on key points. For example, a quality of life survey or an employee engagement survey will pinpoint specifically where a community or company stands in key areas.

2. Do not fall into the trap of rationalizing why the goal is not being achieved. Rationalizations can range from â??talent is not availableâ?• to â??everyone is experiencing the sameâ?• to â??we are doing it already.â?• (You may be doing it, but if it is not getting the needed results, itâ??s time for a different approach.)

3. Get help. Put the ego on the shelf. It is not a sign of weakness to admit that despite our best efforts, the results are still not what they need to be. Itâ??s a sign of self-awareness and coachability, which, together, are the most crucial traits a leader can possess.

4. Take ownership. I am very fortunate to serve on the board of TriHealth. It is a large health system in Cincinnati, Ohio. A year ago, their CEO, Mark Clement, brought in an outside consulting company to look at bias, diversity, and inclusion. Mark is an extremely accomplished CEO, and TriHealth is recognized for excellence. Yet these facts are not enough for Mark. He knows they need to be even better. Being a board member, I am involved in education on bias, diversity, and inclusion. It has been a healthy wake-up call for me. Even better is that many organizations have come together, and there is now a Cincinnati initiative beyond one organization. My learnings have led me to bring in outside expertise in this area.

5. Outside expertise is not too expensive. In addition to â??we can do this on our own,â?• cost is often used as a main reason to not get help. People may assert that it is too expensive to measure employee engagement, to provide training to managers and staff, to conduct a quality of life survey, to bring in additional expertise. My response is it is more expensive *not* to.

Once a person, company, or community becomes aware of shortcomings, the â??we did not knowâ?• excuse is no longer valid. We all have a human responsibility to address issues and be part of the solution. And often, bringing in help is a big step toward finding that solution.

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