

Bringing Hope to Our Next Generation of Leaders!

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“...the generation that came of age in the last 50 years, my generation, will be remembered most for the incredible bounty and freedom it received from its parents and the incredible debt burden and constraints it left on its kids.”

Thomas L. Friedman, *NY Times*, July 2011 – ‘The Clash of Generations’

Friedman was in Greece at the time of writing, observing the youthful backlash to government austerity measures. He also quoted Greece’s deputy prime minister, Theodoros Pangalos, who, when asked what happened to all the European loans and subsidies that fueled the Greek binge after 1981, said, “We ate it together” – referring to both the people and the politicians.

Can the same be said for so many businesses and organizations in the more advanced economies? Have they also “eaten” their way through numerous easy bank loans, government grants and other forms of capital so that the next generation will now be left to pick up the debt tab?

Friedman went on to illustrate the similarities between young people demonstrating in Greece and Egypt. He surmised that it wasn’t “freedom” so much they were pursuing as much as “justice.” He detected there was a deep sense of *theft* in both countries: a feeling as to how capitalism played out in their economies and truly let them down.

Similarly, this sentiment of injustice may also be felt over time in the advanced western societies, too, as economies stagnate under the shadow of enormous debt. Will that increase pressure on our current generation of executives (across the full spectrum of organization types) to put this right, otherwise its retirement years are going to be spent in relative misery?

What can our current generation of executives do to move the ball in the right direction? One key urgent need is to teach the next generation how to become better business or organization leaders than our baby boomer generation – with the emphasis being on *leaders* rather than *managers*. Our prevailing fascination with efficient management is what got us into this mess, whereas effective leadership is more likely to possess the ingredients to dig us out of it. A majority of organization executives believe they are good leaders, when, in fact, they’re more like super managers or bosses.

For the last 2-3 decades executives felt they had made their mark when they had “made money”; they flipped or acquired organizations (with minimal investment) to make more money; they paid their people; and they inserted systems that would crank out additional money. The numbers generated were for owners and/or Wall Street analysts, since their primary role as managers was and is to “make money.” Leaders, on the other hand, don’t think and operate this way.

Instead, effective business leaders focus on giving customers, their own people and all related stakeholders an

extraordinary experience. They are really passionate and devoted to such intentions (not just words). Why? Because they realize that, if they succeed in giving the various stakeholders an extraordinary experience, they will make significant amounts of money (it will just happen).

And so traditional managers are driven to make money: while leaders are driven to give their various stakeholders an extraordinary experience. There’s no comparison in the longer term result. Our next generation of leaders needs to be taught this axiom, both for their sake and that of retiring baby boomers (who are likely to have a shameful retirement).

Our current Great Recession is a clear sign that our organization systems have run out of steam. Taking these to a new level will release oodles of hidden talent and job passion, which in turn will bring fresh capital to invest in the many new ideas generated. The question is: will the current executive class allow this to happen? Will it be willing to set aside its slavishness to management thinking, which it has depended upon for so many years, to allow alternative ideas to emerge and bring a fresh edge to every organization?

Now is the time to get started. There is no time to waste. We must introduce our next generation to Strategic Frameworks (*compelling*) rather than strategic planning (*confining*); Motivation Level 3 instead of our current level 2 (see book “Drive” by Daniel Pink); Enterprise Teams (*dynamic*) instead of rigid hierarchies (*conforming*); Option Solving (*magical*) in place of problem solving (*depressing*); Effectiveness Thinking (*creating breakthroughs*) rather than our reliance on efficiency (*spiraling downwards*); Role Mastery (*inspiring*) instead of performance appraisal (*shaming*); and so on. Such tools and techniques will have the ability to release untold talent and passion, and create the dynamic for significant growth and profit (across the economy). Capitalism has considerable possibilities for improvement.

With such action, we can bequeath “hope” to our succeeding executive generation rather than bestow on them an awesome burden. In retirement, we will, instead, be bursting with pride at our country’s burgeoning wealth, as opposed to being guilt-ridden at the legacy of a financial quagmire.

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