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Leadership Lessons — Dénouement

Skills and Professional Development



I started this column nearly two years ago, and this will be my last one for the Docket's Career Path column. For those of you who read my first piece, you may recall I referenced Donald Rumsfeld's book, *Rumsfeld's Rules*, in which he outlined a list of "rules" he had developed while he was in Congress and working for three presidents. I thought, "Why haven't I ever developed my list?" So, I began to document my own learnings and rules for career success that I could reflect on and share with others. And it was from that list that I grouped key learnings, which helped shape the 18 articles I've written for the column.

I highly recommend writing (ACC would like that) or teaching, because I believe that the best way to learn is to collect and structure your thoughts around a topic. I have found as I am writing, teaching, and recommending the audience or readers to do something, I often self-reflect and realize I should be doing (or doing better at) what I am suggesting.

Over the past two years, I have tried to cover what I believe to be the personal attributes that make you successful, key personal leadership attributes, and some actions to take to obtain superior results. Keep in mind, it is easy to read these suggestions, but the challenge is to actually embody them. Encouraging, accepting feedback, and self-realization are key. It doesn't really matter how you may think you are, but it matters how others perceive you. To understand how others perceive you, you need to be open to and listen to feedback, and have trusting relationships to get honest and candid feedback. And if you want to be perceived a different way, you need to take action.

I have often said my job is rather simple; all I do are four things, which are easy to say, but hard to effectively execute: (1) pick the team; (2) set the team's direction; (3) recognize and reward those who help the team achieve superior results; and (4) have the strength and fortitude to make timely ultimate decisions, with good judgment, including deciding who stays and who leaves the team.

At the end of the day, you are only as good as your people. So, choosing who you surround yourself with, and listen to as you make decisions is the most important thing you can do. Listen, listen, listen. Most people in conversations are waiting for a break so they can talk again. Affirmatively listen before you say anything. Always ensure you recognize the value of diversity and surround yourself with it in all respects. Once you have your team in place, work with them and the business to set the culture and direction for any project or organization. The culture has to value people, diversity, and inclusion, and ensure everyone is actively engaged.

Recognition and rewards for your team are critical. Never skimp on education, technology, or compensation. I remember when I was the chief technology officer at MassMutual, I visited the offices of one of our partners in India. For those of you who have not done this, most major corporations have spaces or floors in their building where the employees working on your matters are located. As I walked through the offices in Chennai, I noted that our partners' desktop screens were smaller than the ones we use in the United States. I demanded that their screens be upgraded to be similar to ours as I wanted to create an environment where employees wanted to work for MassMutual instead of other entities; I want to be the employer of choice for the best and brightest.

Although I truly believe leadership is moving to the cloud (group decision-making), and diverse teams will make better decisions and always obtain better results than the top-down, authoritarian approach, at some point, a decision has to be made. Delay in making a decision or a non-decision can often be worse than even the wrong decision. Because the team is so important, your decisions on who is on the team and who should be off the team should be made decisively and without delay.

Since I retired from MassMutual in April, I've been thinking about what I should do next. Lloyd Cutler, who I was privileged to have worked with, always counseled, "you should retire to something."

Recognizing that we are generally the best at what we like doing, I am very fortunate. I have the flexibility to continue to be engaged in what I truly enjoy doing, which is helping individuals and law departments be as successful as possible.

Because diverse individuals and leaders often do not have equal access to coaching or mentoring, I hope I can provide them with suggestions and ideas on how they can be successful. However, anyone who interacts or listens to me must remember that all my ideas are not good, and they need to modify them based upon their individual challenges and circumstances. But I have always said, better to have one good idea out of 10 ideas, than none at all.

Recently, I agreed to work with the law firm of Perkins Coie as a senior client advisor as part of their Client Advantage program. In this role, Perkins Coie has given me the opportunity to provide advice and counsel to existing or potential clients and to any new or existing general counsel and their leadership teams on how to effectively and efficiently lead a corporate legal department, develop operational processes and solutions, and adapt to trends in legal services. What will I cover to help them? My Leadership Lessons, of course... Please keep in touch.

C'est tout. Au revoir.

En francais: That's all, and not goodbye, but goodbye and until we meet again.

NOTES

1 M. Roellig, Voices, Lessons Learned, Lessons Shared, ACC Docket, April 2018.

I actually sent Don a note with my list of Leadership Lessons and told him the only quote I stole from him was from General Charles DeGaulle, "The cemeteries of the world are filled with indispensable men." He graciously responded with a nice note and said he really liked that quote too.

M. Roellig, Voices, 5 Attributes for a Successful Carrier, ACC Docket, November 2019.

M. Roellig, Voices, Create Your Personal Leadership Philosophy, ACC Docket, May 2018.

M. Roellig, Voices, Litigation Doesn't Have to Be Bad News for Your Company — Or for You, ACC Docket, May 2019, M. Roellig; Looking for Exceptional Leadership? Look for Exceptionally Engaged Teams, ACC Docket, July/August 2019; M. Roellig, Voices, Develop Your Slurp, ACC Docket, October 2019.

M. Roellig, Voices, Picking Your Team, ACC Docket, October 2018.

M. Roellig, Voices, How the "Best Person for the Job" Advances Diversity and Inclusion, ACC Docket, December 2018; Why Diversity and Inclusion Will Advance Your Business and Your Career, ACC Docket, April 2019.

M. Roellig, Voices, Ethics, Expenses and Culture, ACC Docket, November 2018; M. Roellig, Voices, Develop Your Slurp, *supra*.

M. Roellig, Voices, How the "Best Person for the Job" Advances Diversity and Inclusion," ACC Docket, *supra*; Why Diversity and Inclusion Will Advance Your Business and Your Career, *supra*; M. Roellig, Voices, Looking for Exceptional Leadership, Look for Exceptionally Engaged Teams, *supra*.

M. Roellig, Voices, Exponential Change Requires Continuous Learning, ACC Docket July/August 2018.

M. Roellig, Voices, Compensation Matters, ACC Docket, January/February 2019.

M. Roellig, Voices, Cloud Leadership, ACC Docket, June 2019.

M. Roellig, Voices, Judgment Day, ACC Docket, September 2018.

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