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The Chairmen's RoundTable Shares Top Ten Leadership Lessons from The Battlefield

- Presentation by Colonel McMaster provided insights on leadership from a military perspective that can be applied to a complex business environment -

San Diego, CA – June 2, 2009 – The Chairmen's RoundTable (CRT), a San Diego-based, non profit volunteer organization that provides gratis mentoring and business advice to CEOs and presidents of local, private businesses, recently presented "Leadership Lessons from the Economic Meltdown" in conjunction with The EMC Business Forum at SDSU. This special event, held last week, featured keynote speaker Colonel H.R. McMaster (soon to be Brigadier General McMaster), a prominent veteran of the Iraq war and noted author of "Dereliction of Duty".

"It was an honor to be able to create a forum for local business owners to hear from Colonel McMaster," said Jeff Campbell, Chairman of the CRT. "There are many lessons learned on the battlefield that can be applied to leading a business. Many local companies are fighting a tough battle right now, so we thought a little military perspective may serve us all well."

The presentation included a panel discussion moderated by George Chamberlain with two CRT member panelists participating, Holly Green and Mike Berthelot. Highlights from the presentation and discussion are provided below.

Top Ten Leadership Lessons from the Battlefield

1. Don't Assume Progress Will be Linear

You may find yourself on course and then suddenly find that what you anticipated would come next is not what was planned. "Enemy" (competitor) actions are impossible to predict. And never forget, when you are dealing with human nature (competitors, customers, partners, etc.), things become very complex - don't fool yourself into thinking you're in control.

2. Don't Over Proceduralize Planning

There is no checklist for creative thinking. When we get too caught up in processes and procedures, or when we step too far away from the problem as we try to find a solution, our planning becomes ineffective. There is a balance between great checklists and in the moment response.

3. Don't Make Decisions Without Visiting the Front lines

Leaders should size up the situation separately from his/her staff. Be sure to gather your own information from the frontlines – for a business this would include input from sales staff, field technicians, customer support and directly from the customers. Unlike higher-level managers, the people on the frontline are more likely to tell you when things aren't going well and you'll have your own perspective on what you see without the filters of others.

4. Don't Receive Guidance Uncritically

You can't meet your objectives if you're not asking the right questions. It's important to surround yourself with people who you trust, but all advice should be questioned, regardless of the source.

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5. Don't Move Forward Without Accurate Intelligence

Don't rely on standard reports. Go to multiple sources and ask the same questions. Cast the net widely to ensure that you get different perspectives. Over time, understand the strengths and weaknesses of your sources so that you can weigh their input accordingly. And try to understand what the second and third impact will be – for every action there will be a response, but sometimes we only factor in the initial reaction which can be a big mistake.

6. Don't Underestimate the Power of Propaganda

Perception is all that matters. Regardless of the reality of a situation, it is how your customer, community, industry, etc. perceive it to be that will determine how they will react. You need to seize and retain the initiative so that the “enemy” reacts to you and you're not forced to react to them. And this includes sending out your own propaganda.

7. Don't Stop Asking the Basic Questions

Where are the opportunities and how do we exploit them? Where are the dangers and how do we protect ourselves against them? With an ever-changing environment, you may need to ask yourself these questions more frequently to optimize your planning.

8. Don't Be Afraid to Change Your Thinking

Sometimes we get caught up in flawed ideas and we just can't let them go. We make decisions based on what worked last time, or we may have learned the wrong lesson from our previous experience. We need to unlearn, recognizing that many factors contributed to a success or failure in the past – and it is impossible to reproduce those exact same factors again. So the answer simply cannot lie in just what we did before.

9. Do Create An Environment for Collaborative Planning

Be sure to do planning at the right level. The people involved must have the right level of seniority to have influence. Be sure you have a shared vision and an agreement on how you will deal with problems –and that no one is there solely to protect their own narrow interests.

10. Do Make Sure Your Objective is Clear

Know what the mission is! Assign key tasks and ensure that everyone understands what is important – that there is a clear sense of priority. Send out simple, clear messages constantly to keep everyone on track.

About Chairmen's RoundTable

The Chairmen's RoundTable is a non-profit volunteer organization comprised of 45 current and former Chief Executive Officers with extensive board of directors experience and diverse industry backgrounds. CRT mentors provide businesses in San Diego County priceless business advice and mentorship without compensation, as a way of giving back to the community. CRT's well-defined mentoring program is ideal for small to mid-sized companies at a strategic crossroads that are looking to gain an outside perspective on key business issues. To date, over 200 local companies have benefited from CRT's mentorship. For more information and to read about past client successes, please visit www.chairmensroundtable.com.

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