

# **THE CEO AGENDA 4**

## **March 2002**

### **Summary**

This note aims to provide you with a summary of the balance developed throughout our conversations. In that respect, it will be a checklist of subjects and issues you may want to consider as the circumstances change and evolve.

Your personal and professional success is now in your hands more than ever. You spent much effort and time developing your plans and actions to achieve the agenda. Your family actively participated and contributed; in a way, you developed a shared commitment to this new era and a fresh approach to your future. This is a challenge and a responsibility.

The programs you developed are powerful and essential. They need to be kept in balance and perspective. Assess their contribution to your advancement and achieving harmony in your agenda. As things occur and conditions and circumstances change, you should examine the plans and the programs and adjust them to reflect your interests better.

To help, here is the list:

- As CEO, you hold the highest line of work in your organization. Ensure that your activities and position reflect line decisions, authority, and actions. Do not assume a staff role or a staff behavior.
- Refrain from expecting or allowing the HR people to plan your career or determine and report your performance. You control your destiny. Determine the skills you need to be surrounded by and make sure the talent is there to support your actions.
- Be close to customers. Get and keep the critical customers of your organization. You must deal with today's customers and anticipate tomorrow's customers.
- Keep physically fit. This will give you energy and motivation.
- Challenge yourself to do something hard and lonely. Do it repeatedly and often. It will strengthen your self-esteem, help you focus, and be ready to face unexpected challenges.
- Think for an hour every day. Think about what works and what does not. Do it purposefully, not while doing something else. Write down your ideas and thoughts in an idea book.

Some of the material presented comes from "How to Become a CEO" by J. J. Fox.

- Keep and use a “Special Ideas” notebook. You will assess the “to dos” and the “not to dos.” It will help commit ideas to actions and avoid apparent mistakes.
- Do not go out for drinks with the gang after work. Give time to your wife and family and to the other personal projects that are important to you. Never get intoxicated with anyone connected to your work environment. Do not drink at lunch; avoid lunch and work out.
- Use office parties and gatherings to achieve what they are meant to be BUSINESS; do not mix business with pleasure.
- Build relationships in the firm regularly. Make one good ally a month. If you need to know who, you need to find out. Make allies with your peers and subordinates, locally and elsewhere.
- Organize “One-Line, Good Job” visits. Every so often, at least once a quarter, visit an essential part of your company. Prepare for the visit by writing out on 3x5 cards for every person a one-line report of some achievement or contribution, business or personal, that the person made. Use the card as a cue card as you meet staff. And compliment them with the specifics at hand. Do the same with your key clients, essential suppliers, family, and friends. The formality of the card is a function of the number of people and how well you know them. Do not let anybody know that you are doing this; impress them.
- Ted Williams and Joe DiMaggio took more batting practices than all their teammates combined; it took over a thousand experiments for Alexander Graham Bell to design a commercially viable phone prototype. Michael Jordan shoots practice 1000 hoops every week. The difference between success and average performance is inches. Thus, every day, do one more thing at home, at work, or on the practice lane.
- Do not take work home; your time at home should be shared. Tell your family that your time at home belongs to them and you. This is an opportunity to work on your hobbies and general interests and share them with family and friends. If you always take work home, it is because (1) you do not manage your activities and priorities correctly; (2) You are boring to those who need you; and (3) you are not making good use of your precious and scarce non-work time.
- Manage your list of “invitational credentials”. Make sure you develop your inner special list of those who make your list and that you work towards selectively getting on some other inner groups. Work on your social skills to achieve that.
- Keep a good “people file” and keep your address book organized and updated. Every so often, sends a note to people you do not see regularly, and keep the network alive, whether with old classmates, ex-colleagues, etc. Do this simple effort of people linkage.

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- Be very selective about how you make friends within the organization. Do not become “buddy-buddy” with your superiors or with your subordinates. Please get to know your boss, understand and relate to his problems, and stay on the friendship line.
- Do not try to hide an elephant. Big problems do not disappear; they always surface, and the negative fallout is terrible and worse than the problem itself. The discoverers will take great advantage of it against you. A preemptive approach a la Kennedy is the best: “My fault, we blew it; any questions?” This will strengthen you.
- Be visible as much as possible without overdoing it or stealing your boss’s thunder. Remember that words are cheap, and deeds are dear. Ted Levitt from Harvard Business School said: creativity without implementation is irresponsibility.” Pick your spots to shine and get the most out of them.
- Learn regularly learn. Go to the library on some frequency, once a month. Organize your to-do list of “big” projects and use your quiet library time to learn about them, think, and put in a calm workday. This will energize you and help you establish order and priorities.
- Select a series of books that are not necessarily work-related, study them, and learn from them about yourself and for yourself and your family. A sample of such books would include:
  - Obvious Adams
  - The Art of War
  - The Book of Five Rings
  - The Prince
  - Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations
  - The Sun Also Rises
  - The Ape and the Sushi Master
  - The Language of Cells
  - Huckleberry Finn
- Dress for a dance. The idea is that you dress for football, play football, dress for a dance, and dance. The same holds for business. Practice being Presidential all the time.
- Overinvest in people. Over-invest with emotional currency. Give the winners trust, independence, freedom, praise, and encouragement. Higher people are needed for integrity, an “I can do” attitude, and intelligence. It would be best to overpay these people so you can always keep them.

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- Listen Exercise listening. Home at work, at meetings at every opportunity. Listening is equated with wisdom and intelligence; learn how to do it.
- Be the number one company flag waver and cheerleader and set an example on how to use it.
- Never panic; do not lose your temper. “Nothing gives one person so much advantage over another as to remain cool and unruffled under all circumstances” (Thomas Jefferson). Tell yourself to stay calm even if someone makes an offensive comment; laugh at it, and your followers will be equally offended. If you have ten seconds to decide or respond, take nine seconds to think.
- Learn to speak and write in plain language. This is essential for communication with all levels of the organization. Business communication must be precise, complete, and comprehensive. Both written and verbal communication. Follow these guidelines:
  - Be sure your letter or memo is necessary.
  - Have a single specific objective for the communication.
  - Choose the most straightforward mode possible.
  - Do the homework and have all the facts.
  - Write a scattergram of all your points.
  - Organize the message carefully.
  - Write a zero draft.
  - Edit ruthlessly to a one-page final draft.
  - Use language your audience will understand.
  - Master the languages of the times: English, Finance, and Information. In the future, business language is a must.
- Treat all people as unique. People are individuals; they can do much if it is appreciated and even more when motivated and thanked. Be polite to everyone all the time. Be on time, don't let people wait in the lobby, and do not waste anybody's time on your account.
- Never underestimate an opponent. These are competitors, rival managers, or some committee members. Do not be misled by appearance or reputation. Never underestimate an opponent's stamina, intelligence, or skills. Never underestimate their capacity for good or evil.
- Remember that execution must always be perfect even when a concept is not. The ideal is the enemy of the better.

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- Record and collect your mistakes with care and pride. Mistakes are milestones; they indicate actions in new and inexperienced areas. They are learning devices. Acknowledging mistakes is a sign of security, maturity, and confidence. It shows a willingness to try new things and walk through the unknown's gates. The record becomes the memorabilia of a successful CEO.
- Have fun, be there. Enjoy the execution, and always smile.
- Treat your family as your number one and most crucial clarinet. It would be best if you had the support of your family; it will help you in your career. It would be best to have an enthusiastic spouse who understands that some sacrifice is necessary. Your family is your ally for the future. Have your family on your calendar, schedule their needs, and keep those a high priority. Respond to your family as you do to that very important client.
- No goals, no glory; you need goals to win. A goal is a result of a successful effort. This is true in business as it is in life: no goals, no wins! Work with goals and have it broken down to your to-do list. Carry them out and develop new ones.
- Always remember the family of your closest collaborators; recall their circumstances and needs; they depend on you and are committed to making you successful. Respond in kind.
- Do not be an empire builder. It is not about having the most significant budget but getting the job done. Be a producer, not a people administrator. Push the results, not the paper and the pencil.
- To teach is to learn and to lead. Always accept the chance to give a training presentation in your company. You will prepare your presentations and consider the messages you want to share. Good preparation and practice will produce a good presentation and an essential opportunity for interaction with the audience. This will help create strong circles of influence.

The ideas presented here are, in a way, a “recipe” like a summary of things we discussed that you have identified as barriers to overcome and programs to fulfill in your professional and personal agendas. It will help to reread some of these occasionally for enhancement and to refresh the commitment.