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Stephen H Baum Leadership

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First Time CEO Leadership Instincts

Fri, May 13, 2011

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Met new CEO of Rockefeller University, Mark Tessier-Levigne this week. Brief conversation about leadership took place before the wonderful Women & Science program (more about that later).

Formerly the Chief Scientist at Genentech, he had thousands of research scientists reporting to him. Could he tell who would be the most productive? What were the leadership challenges? Answers...some scientists rise meteorically while others have a steady but slower trajectory of contributions. What is needed is treating each set appropriately, making sure they are on the right projects and with the right resources.

What leadership lessons do you carry with you into this new post as president of a major research university? Among other answers: the best any leader can do is to try to make good decisions (best is the enemy of good) after gathering input from the right sources; there are no perfect decisions and plenty of good decisions can have bad outcomes but few decisions are truly irreversible; almost any timely decision is better than prolonged indecision as the organization needs it to function well.

He believes it a privilege to lead an institution with such a track record and reputation of breakthrough developments. For me, it is a privilege to hear (and meet personally at lunch) world class scientists such as Leslie B. Vosshall who leads the Neurogenetics and Behavior laboratory doing ground-breaking work in scents and behavior. She communicated the advanced science underlying her lab's findings, parallels and differences between visual and olfactory processes in humans, the consequences of the findings and the research methods and practices — but did so in a way that was digestible for the lay public and incredibly entertaining at the same time (great analogies, interesting and funny anecdotes and visual aids). She and her

colleagues have repeatedly demonstrated the ability to convey complexities of genetics and biology in terms as simple as traffic patterns, sports and other every day experience.

What a privilege and pleasure to be in their presence. You can connect with them at their website which helps them raise funds to support women in science:

[Women & Science Rockefeller University](#)

That's my view. What's yours?

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[Thriving in the New Normal](#)

Thu, May 12, 2011

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Thriving in the New Normal

What follows are notes from a conversation yesterday with Jim Blasingame, who has his finger on the pulse of small business, His website is one of my faves:

[Small Business advocate](#)

My world includes small business owners, corporate CEOs of firms owned by private equity outfits, private equity firms themselves and corporate CEOs of public companies. These are members of my Vistage peer advisory group or private coaching clients.

In the summer of 2007, some of these men and women were atop companies which are

leading indicators of the economy (staffing, employment screening, some consumer facing businesses) and they saw a storm coming. We all battened down the hatches before 2008 and were the better for it. In late 2008, these same people were seizing very selected growth opportunities (e.g., acquisition of a distressed competitor, hiring a special talent at considerable compensation package).

What do I see now? An “un-frothy,” but intense focus on taking the company to the next higher level. What does this mean? In the specific actions, I see four themes:

1. Continued vigilance against cost creep, protecting hard won fiscal fitness
2. Seizing selected opportunities for growth
3. Upgrading the bench
4. Taking money off the table

I've changed the names for obvious reasons, but here is what is happening:

1. Vigilance with Hard-Won Lean Cost Structures