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Our Universities: Corporate Confidence

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Our Universities: Corporate Confidence

Second in a series of reflections on corporate culture

Any organization of human capital rises and falls based on membership's confidence in corporate mission and means. Effectiveness is achieved when corporate confidence flows liberally. Leadership is the source, whether the flow is a tide or trickle.

“The people who are doing the work are the moving force behind the Macintosh. My job is to create a space for them, to clear out the rest of the organization and keep it at bay.”

Steve Jobs

My home baseball team is the St. Louis Cardinals. I used to be a Yankees fan, a hazard of being raised on Long Island. The Cards and Boston Red Sox are entangled in the World Series. Not being able to predict what I will have for lunch tomorrow, prognosticating on the national pastime is beyond me.

But I know this. Redbirds beware.

The Sox are stuffed with confidence like a Christmas stocking. They came off a miserable 2013 season — 69 and 93. With limited knowledge of the sport, I rely on the pundits who said a one year turnaround was impossible. The pundits earned a check in the “error” column. Circumstances created the about face: a cool general manager, a slate of talent on the roster, and John Farrell. Manager Farrell is the axle around which the whole organization turns and he has invaluable leadership perspective.

An ***Amex Open Forum*** commentary by Jason Brick, posted October 23, credits Farrell's transparent and communicative management style. Observers say it allows him to, “...*use influence, not authority to earn their trust, earn their respect, and create an environment in that clubhouse that is a trusting one.*” Trust builds corporate confidence. It is the key to a successful family, ball club, government organization, or university.

Absent trust girding up corporate confidence, people seek to self-protect. Achievement is displaced by survival. David Ortiz, who the Cards should be particularly mindful of, said “... *the first day of spring training he said that he had our backs.*” Leadership

provides a confidence-rich environment allowing people to unreservedly commit and give their all.

Corporate cultures pitting one person against another never instill confidence, instead they steal it. Brick suggests that the celebration of talent, providence, and a willingness to take chances are the building blocks that allowed Farrell to mastermind the turnaround. Corporate confidence breeds talent, providence, and entrepreneurship. It is cause and effect simultaneously.

In ***Psychology Today*** online, November 23, 2010, Jim Taylor, adjunct professor at the University of San Francisco, suggests: *“If you’re confident, you’re going to be motivated, relaxed, focused, and have mostly positive emotions. In contrast, if you lack confidence, you will likely feel unmotivated, stressed, distracted, and experiencing mostly negative emotions.”* Taylor believes that confidence is skill that can be developed over time, and, while success may breed confidence, it also allows risk-taking, breeding more success. An ascending corporate culture.

Google posts on its corporate website ***Ten Things We Know to Be True*** as the fundamental operational concepts. Number One on the list, *“Focus on the user and all else will follow.”* Such focus requires corporate confidence. Without confidence in the larger group the full energy of all cannot be given to meeting the user’s needs. Any healthy organization has a foundational focus that must be consistently voiced by leadership and reinforced in day to day action.

“The Culture to Cultivate” by George Halvorson, CEO of the health care giant, Kaiser Permanente, appeared in the ***Harvard Business Review*** online in August. His pronouncement: People need to have the confidence to speak up about continuous improvement at every step. “Our culture lets our employees know that if they see a way to do something better, they should take the initiative to point it out,” says he.

University students are not ball players, customers, doctors, users, clients, tenants, patients or any other receiver or giver of service. They are students — a special and unique breed unto themselves. When that incontrovertible truth is openly recognized and set forth as the *raison d’être*, our universities will be successful. Organizational confidence allows razor-sharp focus. If leadership doesn’t believe it, no one, not a single student, faculty, staff or family member will.

Our universities must be mindful of confidence and its impact on organizational success.

John Farrell and the Beantown Boys are worth watching, whatever the outcome.

Even for a St. Louis fan.

