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Required Reading for Growing Companies

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# we are fam-i-ly!

**M**y focus in writing these columns over the past twenty months has been to contribute to making you, my CEO readers smart--book smart, street smart, and sharing-experience smart. The individual topics have come from whatever is first and foremost in my life each month.

Several weeks ago my wife and I, our four children, spouses and eight grandchildren had a family reunion in the Catoctin Mountains near Thurmont. They came from Switzerland, Colorado, New York City and south of Washington. It was a joyous time, and it raised the topic for this month. How does a CEO view and utilize his or her family experiences smartly? What is that unique contribution that family makes that enables you to better perform your role as leader?

As CEOs, you fill your days with reading sales, production and financial reports, courting customers and prospects, public relations appearances, networking with other CEOs--all of which tend to be activities of the mind--calculated under the best of circumstances, manipulative under the worst of circumstances. A rational allocation of our time is the highest value under this approach.

Families present us with a different value--the value of heart. Eddie Fisher sang, "You gotta have heart, all you really need is heart." While heart is not all you need as a CEO, you definitely do need it. From heart come affection, gratitude, warmth, spontaneous emotion, happiness, deep satisfaction, savoring and love. These human qualities that all people instantly relate to form the glue which holds our business organizations together in good times and bad.

In our families we "let ourselves go" and "just be ourselves." Many CEOs find refuge in that freedom and re-creation in that space, so that they can "go out and fight the world another day." Few realize how being yourself as you are at home has applicability in the workplace. I challenge you to let more of your "family side" come through in the workplace so that you can draw on both head and heart to strengthen your leadership of your organization.

Some CEOs get caught up in "looking out for number one." This may come as a reaction to the organizational burnout of having served others for years and deprived self, or it may come from a philosophy of self first and others second. Families help with this attitude, because they are a continual reminder that it's not just about

me, it's about us.

My coach sometime ago quoted me the first century sage Hillel, who said,

If I am not for myself, then who will be for me?  
 And if I am only for myself, what am I?  
 And if not now, when?

Families can provide us with this balance if we are open to it. We do need to pay attention to ourselves and all our wants and needs so that we will not end up feeling deprived. And we need to pay attention to the needs of others for whom we are responsible, so that all in the family may prosper in all the ways they can. It's a great model for an awareness that there is always a wider constituency, a collective good that you as a CEO are serving, with which your good is inextricably intertwined.

Closely related to this sense of balance which families give us is the sense of multiple windows on the world. How often has your spouse asked you, as Anne does me, "Well, how was your world today?" Each of us, as family members, does have a different view of the world each day and

throughout our lives. As family and business leaders, we learn from those views, treating them as worthy and legitimate as our own. In practical terms, this means that your three year old or the "lowliest" person in your corporation may have an insight for you today that you can get from no other source. Not being open to that insight will make your leadership less than it otherwise might be.

One of the focuses that families have is just plain fun. Webster's Dictionary defines "fun" as "what provides amusement or enjoyment; playful often boisterous action or speech." How long has it been since you've had "playful, boisterous action" in your workplace? Suppose you added "Fun-maker" to your list of titles and planned some of that action.

One of my CEO clients did just that. He planned some games and exercises for the beginning and end of certain workdays when he believed they would fit. It took a little while for his employees to get used to the idea of their leader really wanting them to have fun and leading them in it. Once they did, they loosened up and really let go. People saw many of their number in a whole new light. There was a "family atmosphere."



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Planning games may not be your forte. But how about something you genuinely enjoy where your enthusiasm will enroll others? Maybe it's a softball game or a three-legged race, or a talent night. "Loosen up and lighten up" activities strengthen relationships which may get your organization through those rock and hard place passages which otherwise would be problematic. Through such activities people relate to each other in ways other than a hierarchical power order, or a classification in a wage and salary plan.

To be a family-smart CEO, you have to have a family. Then you need to be a full-fledged, present member of that family. By being present, your unique family leadership strengths emerge. In the process, your family experience will enrich your business leadership.

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