

Leadership – The Intangibles

The higher someone rises in an organization, the more important their intangible qualities become, suggests Delta Air Lines CEO Richard Anderson. In an interview with Adam Bryant that appeared in the New York Times Business section on April 25, 2009, he discusses the unquantifiable aspects of human capital; the values and character traits that don't show up on a resume, but, almost always dictate a person's ultimate success with an organization.

Patience

Everything the CEO does sets an example, and people take their cue from the top. When you lose your temper, it squelches debate and sends the wrong signal about how you want your organization to run. CEO's have a tendency to push really hard and want to go really fast. Change can't ever be fast enough. But you do have to be patient enough and make sure that you always remain calm.

Problem Solving

You really need to be a problem-solver, not a problem-creator. Don't bring a Rubik's cube to the table, unless you have an idea on how you're going to try to get an answer.

Operational Awareness

Just like a pilot flying an airplane, you've got to have your head up and have situational awareness of everything that's going on around you. There is so much going on in the world today, you've got to understand the global implications of your decisions.

Time Management

Only touch paper once. Return your calls promptly. Stick to your schedule. Anderson keeps his watch 10 minutes ahead and uses his time wisely. Once a month, he takes the next six months and re-reviews how he is using his time and reprioritizes what he is doing.

Gratitude

You've got to be thankful to the people who get the work done, and you've got to be thankful to your customers. Anderson makes a habit of writing hand-written notes to people, up to a half a dozen a day.

Communication

You have to be able to handle the written and spoken word. Anderson doesn't mean being able to make a Power Point presentation. He does mean having the ability to think clearly and use more than just a phrase with a bullet in front of it. You must be able to communicate with a subject, a verb and an object, so you are expressing complete thoughts.