

First Quarter, 1996



Managing the Team at the Top (Abstract)

By David A. Nadler

More often than not, today's C.E.O.'s are not only leaders of their companies, they direct a small team of ambitious top executives - their fellow members of the Office of the Chief Executive. For many of them, schooled perhaps in the traditional authoritarian mold, eyeballing with their near-peers is by far the tougher assignment.

David Nadler, a consultant who has worked closely with nearly 50 C.E.O.'s who lead executive teams, elaborates upon the classic problem: the C.E.O. who confuses participation with a lack of leadership. As executive teams emerge to cope with the increasing complexities of running a major enterprise, the C.E.O. will need to be an effective team leader without giving up his effectiveness as an individual leader. In other words, he must wear "two hats." But how does he reconcile these dual roles?

One answer suggested by Mr. Nadler is for a C.E.O. to be very explicit about his two roles. He should make it transparently clear to his team members when he wants decisions reached by consensus and when he wants to make them alone. This way, everyone knows where they stand, the C.E.O. included.

The C.E.O. will also benefit, Mr. Nadler adds, by putting himself in the position of team builder. He can retain outside help to assist, but the C.E.O. himself will be ultimately responsible for selecting team members, determining their roles and setting out each team's charter. The role of the C.E.O. is not just that of leader or even team leader, therefore, but also of team builder and developer over time. Carried out effectively, the rewards are significant for the C.E.O. and of immense value to the team members and the company as a whole.

Reprint No. 96106