

“What Sets Successful CEOs Apart”

Harvard Business Review

May-June 2017 Issue

<https://hbr.org/2017/05/what-sets-successful-ceos-apart>

Key Points

- Disconnect between 1) perception of ideal CEO; and 2) characteristics of high performing CEOs. In other words, the attributes that make candidates look good have little connection to what makes the selected CEO succeed.
- Although boards often hire charismatic extroverts, introverts are more likely to surpass the expectations of boards and investors.
- Nearly all CEO candidates have made material mistakes in the past, with 45% of them having a major career blowup.
- There is no correlation between educational pedigree and performance.
- Although high confidence levels help a candidate's chances of being chosen as CEO, it provides no advantage in performance.
- Four key behaviors for successful leaders: 1) Deciding with speed and conviction; 2) Engaging for impact; 3) Adapting proactively; and 4) Delivering reliably.
- High-performing CEOs don't distinguish themselves by regularly making great decisions. They stand out for being more decisive, making decisions earlier, faster, and with greater conviction and consistency.
- High IQ executives struggle with decisiveness - smart, slow decisions frustrate teams and lead to attrition of talent. You can't wait for perfect information to make the perfect decision.
- Wrong decisions are often better than no decisions. Teams need direction. Once a path is chosen, press ahead without wavering. Teams lose faith in leaders who waffle or backtrack.
- Solicit multiple points from trusted advisors who will provide unvarnished opinions and sound judgment.
- Get buy-in among key employees and other stakeholders. Identify detractors and their concerns, and channel that energy into something positive, rather than resistance.
- Be cautious of moods and body language, and their unintended consequences.
- Don't shy away from controversy; be willing to engage in, and manage conflict. Give everyone a voice, but not a vote.
- Adjust well and proactively to rapidly changing environments, dealing with unforeseen situations.
- Allocate a significant amount of time to long-term thinking (as much as 50%), picking up on early signals and plugging into broad information flows, and sensing change earlier and making advantageous strategic moves.
- Setbacks are integral to change, and can be opportunities to learn and grow.
- Be a steady hand – teams trust predictable leaders.
- Surround yourself with a strong team.