

# What We Wish CEOs Knew and Practiced About the Ministry of Management

*Lessons from Nehemiah and a  
CMA Member Survey!*

By Karen Y. Wilson-Starks

**N**ehemiah was uniquely called and prepared by God to revive his people from the ash heap of Babylonian exile to the Promised Land of a renewed relationship with God. When Nehemiah was commissioned for this CEO role, he was serving as cupbearer to Artaxerxes, King of Babylon.

Because of God's favor, King Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah permission to travel to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall that was in ruins and whose gates had been burned with fire. Although Nehemiah was a government official and manager, and not a prophet, priest, or king, God used him to minister to his people.

Who is this new type of Moses that God is calling to minister to His people? He is calling organization leaders, CEOs, who have first submitted themselves to God, his Word, and his direction. Through such leaders, God is expanding his kingdom and deploying his laborers to the fields now white unto harvest.

Like Queen Esther, all members of his royal priesthood, all Christians, have been placed in their jobs and roles for such a time as this. If you are a Christian, regardless of your work setting, you have a divine kingdom mission to be salt and light and a city set on a hill.

## **The CMA Survey on CEOs—and How CEOs Should Respond to God's Call**

In a recent informal survey of CMA members, respondents

were asked to rank the importance of a number of CEO leadership and management activities, to identify CEO actions that most minister to them, and to talk about CEO behaviors that most annoy them.

The results of the survey completed by 106 CMA members are reflected in the selection and ordering of the core leadership tasks and other points addressed in this article.

### ■ **CEOs Must Understand 7 Core Leadership Tasks**

Here are seven core leadership tasks that CMA members indicated CEOs must understand and practice:

1. Set and clearly articulate a compelling and exciting vision that inspires commitment
2. Set and communicate realistic and challenging strategic goals/expectations that lead to excellent results
3. Walk in integrity—do what you say you will do
4. Effectively use and deploy talent
5. Treat staff and others as valuable team members—regularly access and use their views and input
6. Show appreciation for the contributions of staff and others
7. Demonstrate compassion and caring

### ■ **CEOs Must Set Direction**

After privately surveying the condition of the wall, Nehemiah laid out the details of the ruinous situation and shared a vision of rebuilding with all of the people (Nehemiah 2:17, 20). He inspired them by reminding them of God's gra-

# When the task is God-sized, like the rebuilding of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, the vision alone is not enough.

sciousness to him before the King (Nehemiah 4:14).

Although the vision to rebuild the wall remained constant, the specific steps necessary to ensure successful completion of the wall changed as their circumstances changed. Specifically, a number of additional security measures had to be added to counter attacks planned by their enemies. To ensure

not enough. People need to know what specific steps to take to fulfill the vision.

## ■ CEOs Must Demonstrate Christ-like Character and Integrity

Nehemiah's relationship with God was so strong that his entire life was bathed in prayer. He was constantly worshipping, confessing personal and corporate sin, and asking for God's

occupy the room (Nehemiah 13:7-9).

The authentic relationship with God is what allows the CEO to know in which direction to lead and in what ways. Survey respondents called this type of relationship "Passionate Spirituality" or "Deep Relationship with the Lord."

Being a person of integrity is not only about the big items like telling the truth and being honest. It's also about day-to-day follow-through on commitments.

One of my clients recently learned that his delay in reclassifying the job of a key leader in his organization almost cost him the services of that employee. Although the delay was to prepare the organization and to put administrative measures in place, his failure to communicate the reasons for the delay and his tendency to want to get all of the details in place before acting, led to mistrust.

CEOs have to be decisive with limited information and have to keep the communication lines open.

## ■ CEOs Must Build a Team

Nehemiah first devoted himself and his men to the work (Nehemiah 5:14). In addition, he appointed gatekeepers, singers, Levites, leaders for Jerusalem and the Citadel, and other trustworthy people to key leadership roles (Nehemiah 7:1; 12:13). He also worked as a co-laborer with Ezra, the priest, who read the book of the law to the people (Nehemiah 8:2). Their separate duties were for the one purpose of God.

CEOs recognize and use the gifts and talents of the people around them. They

## Seven Benefits That Resulted From Nehemiah's Walk With God

Through a regular diet of prayer, fasting, and worship:

1. **God** put on his heart what to do (Nehemiah 2:11)
2. **God** moved the heart of the King in his favor (Nehemiah 2:4)
3. **God** gave divine guidance about dealing with opposition (Nehemiah 4:4,7)
4. **God** strengthened their hands for the work (Nehemiah 6:9)
5. **God** revealed their enemies and evil schemes (Nehemiah 6:12)
6. **God** identified men of integrity for leadership roles (Nehemiah 7:1)
7. **God** led the people in worship and celebration (Nehemiah 8:10, 12; 12:31, 43)

that everyone kept up with plan changes, Nehemiah used the trumpet to establish a communication system (Nehemiah 4:16-20).

Clearly communicating the vision and identifying the goals and actions that lead to fulfillment of the vision are equally as important as stating the vision. Like Nehemiah, CEOs today need to be agile about how to implement the vision and must stay connected enough to pass on new information. When the task is God-sized, like the rebuilding of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, the vision alone is

mercy and favor. No CEO on a divine mission will execute that mission as God intends without daily submitting himself to God as a living sacrifice. The CEO must keenly know as Jesus said, "... without me you can do nothing." (John 15:5, NKJV)

Nehemiah's integrity touched all areas of his life. On one occasion he refused to "protect" himself by hiding in the temple knowing this would be against God (Nehemiah 6:10). Later, he kicked Tobiah out of a room in the court of the Temple and purified the rooms because it was a sacrilege for Tobiah to

don't try to do it all themselves but know there are different gifts and offices for each member of the body. Working through others also includes listening to them and utilizing their input. At different times

another way. This type of information-sharing promotes learning and growing together and increases the likelihood that your staff will continue to offer their ideas.

When the wall was completed, Nehemiah declared a sacred day to the Lord, celebrated by eating choice food and sweet drinks (Nehemiah 8:10). Later at the dedication of the wall, many sacrifices were offered and two choirs, led by the leaders, went up both sides of the wall to sing praises of thanksgiving to God (Nehemiah 12:31-43).

Employees want someone who has the heart to understand them and their needs, to care about them in all aspects of their lives, and to encourage and appreciate them. The ministering CEO is an approachable servant leader who balances spiritual leadership with good management.

Caring CEOs also minister by providing relevant training and development, praying for staff member personal and work needs, and making small talk and unscheduled visits. The ministering CEO is compassionate not only for the cause of the organization but also for the employees.

I know a pastor who accepted a position with a new church. The congregation's tradition had been to prepare and serve meals to the pastor and his family every Sunday after church. The new pastor saw how the lives of church members were disrupted when those members prepared this meal. So he stopped that tradition! It thus created more family time for church members.

#### ■ CEOs Must Minister, Serve and Manage Through Spiritual Preparation

God is calling CEOs and other leaders to minister to his people. First, God must minister to His CEOs as they come daily into his presence for worship, guidance, strength, and direction. They cannot borrow oil from others but must have their own oil for the wedding feast of the bridegroom. Prepared CEOs then serve like Jesus.

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## The Top 7 CEO Actions That Annoy CMA Members the Most!

1. Micromanagement
2. Detachment and lack of communication
3. Indecisiveness and hierarchical decision-making
4. Unrealistic expectations and poor time management
5. Arrogance and self-centeredness
6. Favoritism of both pet projects and people
7. Perfectionism masquerading as excellence

during the rebuilding, Nehemiah stopped to receive reports from the people about the latest ploys of the opposition or the weariness of the people and then he took effective action to address these concerns (Nehemiah 4:12).

A former client regularly got in trouble with his senior team because he often acted independently without seeking the input of those on his staff with relevant content expertise. At other times, he asked for their input but didn't appear to use it.

Accessing the expertise of your staff

#### ■ CEOs Must Show Care and Appreciation

Nehemiah knew that the people for whom he was servant leader were poor and did not have many resources. So he shared the meat at his table daily with others and refused to accept the governor's portion (Nehemiah 5:14). In addition, his interest in them was not only about using their hands and bodies to build the wall, but also about building them up in their spiritual commitment to the Lord. So he stopped their work

## CMA Survey: Other Leadership Responsibilities of CEOs

*In addition to the other responses, these leadership responsibilities for CEOs were also mentioned frequently.*

1. Conflict Resolution
2. Fair and Accurate Discipline
3. Learning and Development
4. Succession Planning
5. Managing Board Relationships
6. Leading Change
7. Promoting Balance

*From a survey of 106 CMA members in December 2005, conducted by Karen Wilson-Starks.*

demonstrates appreciation and valuing of them. In addition, even if you choose to go in a different direction from what they suggest, at least follow-up and acknowledge their feedback and give some reasons for why you chose to go

and selling on the Sabbath (Nehemiah 15:22), denounced inappropriate marriages, purified the priests (Nehemiah 23:31), and stopped them from enslaving and exacting usury from their fellow Jews (Nehemiah 5:1-13).