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Leading into the Future

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Leading into the Future
Economic Club
Chicago IL
March 16, 1998

The subject of our Forum today is leadership – that intangible ingredient that is found in every successful organization and firm. Is it something we can define? Is it a learned behavior or a gift that some people have and others do not? Is it spontaneous or can it be nurtured and developed? Is it an art or a science?

In the business firm, we expect leaders to make right things happen, that is, growth in profits and growth in shareholder value. But they can't do it by themselves.

Drucker's classic definition of management is getting the right things done through others. A leader today, however, can not stop there – he or she must also be concerned about what is happening to people in the process. Those people who are producing the profits are also bombarded by forces of change. They have cares and concerns, emotions and feelings, beliefs and convictions, they can love or they can hate, they can contribute or detract, motivate or are discouraged. They are, in fact, the soul of the firm. Leadership of the firm in the 21st Century must be involved with **soul craft**.

Fortune Magazine has described a soulless company as suffering from an enemy within and cites a quote from Henry Ford as being descriptive of many business leaders: “Why is it I always get a whole person when what I really wanted was a pair of hands?” How many times as leaders have we been guilty of looking at the people in our firms as just a pair of hands – or simply another producer who can be motivated solely as an economic animal by a compensation package or by a new incentive plan or stock option?

How then do we define the responsibility of leaders? Does the business leader have a posture of indebtedness or obligation, if you will, for the growth and development of people? Are they responsible for leading a moral community as well as a firm to generate profits? How will we, as leaders coming to the dawn of a new century, initiate in defining a new social contract for the 21st century?

The assets of our respective firms are increasingly becoming people dependent, not just capital dependent, as our economy is responding to the rapid expansion of information technology and the growing service sector.

As talented and whole people, they are assets of the firm that walk out of the door every night – they want a greater participation in determining their future

and the future of the firm. They are searching for meaning in their work. They want to trust their leaders. They expect their leaders to walk the talk with a transparency that calls for nothing less than truth and full disclosure. They want leaders who will take the time to listen to them and teach them.

There is a wide open door of opportunity for leaders who are both performance and value driven – who have thought deeply about who people are and why they work, not just what they do or how they do it.

A person's leadership may be conferred from above but must be acknowledged and embraced by the troops to be effective. It is maintained and developed by achieving meaningful results and painting a vision for a future of what could be. It is gone when results no longer meet expectations and when this happens there is no fence high enough to protect it or grip strong enough to hold on to it.

Leadership is often tested in a crucible of controversy where perceptions have more weight than reality. It is during such times – at least it has been in my own life – when your beliefs and convictions are confirmed or molded – when you recognize and learn from your mistakes – when true friends stand with you – and when your character is strengthened so you can meet new challenges of the future.

So is it possible then for our business firms to produce leaders of the future – winning leaders at all levels of the organization as distinguished from *wannabes* – bureaucrats, dictators or even managers. Is leadership something that can be both taught and developed?

Our speaker today, Noel Tichy, provides a resounding yes to this question. In fact he suggests that the ultimate test of leadership is the ability of a leader to teach others to be leaders, to provide a teachable point of view. In so doing, the firm, not just the individual, wins.

Noel is a Professor of Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management of the Graduate School of Business, University of Michigan where he is also Director of the Global Leadership Program.

For the past 25 years, he has been dedicated both in his professional and personal life in seeking to understand how organizations can be transformed to provide the very best for all their stakeholders; employees, shareholders, customers and communities. His journey in developing his understanding started in the late 1960s as a result of his fervor for social change and civil rights. This led him to Columbia University where he secured his Ph.D. in social psychology. After

obtaining his degree, he joined the faculty of the Graduate School of Business of Columbia University. During this period of his career, he spent much of his time in health care initiatives supporting poor and underserved areas of the south Bronx of New York City. He wrote his first book in 1977 describing his experience in seeking to make a difference in stimulating and providing leadership for community development. In the early 1980s, he joined the faculty at the University of Michigan where he began his involvement in the study of transformational leadership. In 1986, he co-authored his second book – *The Transformational Leader*. A principal subject of this book was Jack Welch, who at that time was involved in the transformation of General Electric.

Soon thereafter, at the request of Welch, Noel took a two-year leave of absence from the University to participate in GE's world-wide management leadership development initiatives. Following the GE experience in the late 1980s he returned to Michigan to write and apply the lessons he had learned at GE. The title of this third book was one of Welch's major teaching points, i.e. *Control your Destiny or Someone Else Will*. This was a best seller and propelled Noel and his team to not only a world of teaching but also consulting for many major corporate clients. His most recent book, already a best seller, *The Leadership Engine*, describes how winning companies build leaders at every level.

We were one of the companies that Noel included in the study for this book and I can tell you that as part of his research, he looked into every nook and cranny and knows how to ask those penetrating questions.

Noel has been an example to me of a teacher / learner who lives what he teaches and writes. He is able to effectively communicate ideas and principles so that those of us who are seeking to be leader practitioners can readily apply them.

Our own Phil Jackson, coach of the Chicago Bulls, describes Noel as a point guard in the management of organizations, telling us how leaders can use their whole being in creative management. The book, Jackson concludes, is an inspiration to teachers, business leaders and coaches.

Well, Noel, maybe you have the answer for us here in Chicago of how we can develop future Michael Jordans. Thank you for coming. We are looking forward to hearing from you.

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