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chosen field of endeavor. In competitive environments, leadership touted the ...

**Roman Kepczyk** • Jun. 11, 2022



This year's AICPA ENGAGE event wrapped up this week in a hybrid format with approximately 3,700 participants, roughly three-fourths of whom were onsite at the Aria in Las Vegas. While technology is my core focus, the most intriguing speaker (based on the length of notes taken) was Carla Harris, Managing Director and Senior Client Advisor at Morgan Stanley.

She spoke on leadership and the importance of creating a powerful presence, which is as crucial for technology leadership as it is for firm leadership. While leadership is often a “soft” topic subject to personal interpretation, Carla concisely delivered “Eight Pearls of Leadership Wisdom” that everyone could learn from in today’s transitory environment of business and personal uncertainty.

For the past few decades, the path to success and leadership positions for most has

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qualm about leaving the firm to go find it elsewhere. Combine this with the reality that the constant uncertainties created by the pandemic over the past two years also had many “seasoned” employees also questioning their personal career paths. While the turnover most often described as the “Great Resignation,” Carla stated that it was more realistically a “Great Contemplation,” which today’s firm owners need to be in tune with if they want to be effective leaders in this new environment.

- **Pearl #1: Being authentic is a distinct competitive advantage.** If you use your intellectual capacity to promote who you really are, more people will trust you as a leader. This means being authentically visible, transparent, and empathetic which will engender trust from your peers, particularly in these times of instability and confusion. Carla stated that being authentic goes beyond presenting just your work persona but also your private persona where your own interests, hobbies and skills will build a connection with the people you are trying to lead or influence both inside and outside the firm.
- **Pearl#2: Build trust intentionally.** In today’s rapidly evolving world where we are competing on innovation and transformation, we will need increased collaboration at all levels of personnel both internally and with external resources. To gain trust with both employees and with clients, Carla stated that you must simply deliver on what you say you will do, over, and over, and over, consistently. Asking those that you want to influence what they want, what they value, and then helping them achieve/obtain those things is how to build trust intentionally.
- **Pearl #3: Create clarity.** People you are leading perform better when they know exactly what is expected of them. This includes not only defining what represents successful completion of the task but also the timeline and deadline for completion, so expectations are understood by all parties. If project timelines cannot be met it should be discussed as soon as you are aware so alternate paths or resources can be summoned.

- **Pearl #4: Create other leaders to amplify your impact.** One of the keys to being a

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- grow up in increasingly diverse environments and if they don't see that diversity within the companies they are working for, they will find it in other employers where they will be more at home.
- **Pearl #6: Teach your team to innovate.** Innovation means trying new things and taking risks. Taking risks means you are sometimes going to fail. Leaders need to teach their teams that failing is OK when they are attempting something new, and that this failure can provide invaluable experience, particularly when leaders are being constructive and complimentary in addressing the failure.
  - **Pearl #7: Be inclusive.** Great leaders solicit the input of ALL team members. Carla stated that requesting input from each team member by name and then asking them to build upon the discussion at hand or present their concerns, lets them feel as if they are truly part of the team as well as vesting their support for any solution adopted by the team.
  - **Pearl #8: Call a Thing a Thing.** When there is bad news or bad behavior, good leaders need to have the courage to call it out immediately. Being straight with employees and providing positive guidance helps retain trust and facilitates moving things forward. Calling out a "thing" that other team members may also be aware of is motivating to other team members as they know they can count on that leader to address these types of situations for the betterment of all.

Whether you are a firm owner, IT team member, accounting professional or administrative staff, future success depends on your ability to grow and manage your responsibilities, and being a better leader is as important as developing the technical skills that got you to where you are today.

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