

"Driving Growth During Economic Turbulence"

Once again, a prominent business leader headlined the recent Board of Veterans CEOs' forum held on April 23rd, 2010. Richard Goeglein (retired CEO of Harrah's Hotels & Casinos) led a highly charged discussion about *Maintaining a Growth Strategy During Periods of Economic Turmoil*.

Participants - an intimate group of 12 current CEOs of midsize to large companies - had an opportunity to ask penetrating questions on various aspects of growth, from hiring the right people and letting go of the wrong people for the organization's next level of growth to building a board to support significant growth through M&A activity.

In the discussion, Richard Goeglein did not pull punches. He shared one of his biggest failures as a CEO. From there, the sitting CEOs became very open to honestly share the challenges they faced.

When Richard was asked about how to fire people who started with the company, but were no longer able to contribute to the company's success, he stated that when he was a CEO in that position, he learned to first look at himself. He expounded on the importance of understanding your personal leadership style and how it affects the performance of those under you. He suggested a 360 assessment for any CEO asking about the performance of their people. He also suggested moving people to different job functions before firing them. He reinforced that with a message stating the importance of putting people in positions where they are valued and respected. He said, "people know when their job serves no value to the enterprise. If you leave people in that position, you are disrespecting them. Ultimately, that impacts performance."

In addition, Richard made the case for hiring people who hold the same values as you (the CEO), instead of focusing solely on skills and competencies. This becomes even more important when you are hiring smart, successful people to accomplish an objective they may not have pursued in the past. This is often the dilemma of companies experiencing hyper growth.

As the conversation progressed, participants asked questions about managing the board of directors that held a very conservative approach to growth when the opportunities required a more assertive, risk taking approach. The suggestions from Richard as well as the other sitting CEOs was to build a board that could support where the company is going, instead of working with a board built for past accomplishments. The challenges facing the CEO with a conservative board were significant. In fact, the advice from everyone was overwhelmingly in favor of increasing the level of communication with each board member before pursuing M&A activity.

The roundtable discussion ended with comments on how it was "good to see that other CEOs were facing the same problems." There was a sentiment of relief from each sitting CEO when they saw that other CEOs were seeking the solutions to similar problems.

As usual, the feedback from the forum was overwhelmingly positive, emphasizing the tremendous value there was to discussing critical business issues with such experienced and accomplished business leaders. As a result, several new CEOs have joined the Board and interest is growing for the next forum (scheduled for June 25th).

The Board Chairman, Ted Santos commented, "The quality of the roundtable discussions have remained high. Because of that, the caliber of our members has increased. For us, that creates a welcomed challenge if we are to continue to exceed the expectations of our members".

For more information on The Board of Veteran CEOs, please call 888 471-3660.