

Transformation, Trust, & the Top Line

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Growth, transformation, and leadership all have their own challenges, but the best leaders recognize that they aren't separate disciplines. Success comes from setting a clear direction, aligning the culture behind it, and ensuring that the people and the strategy are supported to sustain success.

01 LEADING THE TOP LINE

If you can control revenue, you can manage the bottom line. Cost management is much easier than revenue management, often leading to a disproportionate focus on one-time cost reductions rather than revenue growth to drive gross profits and bottom-line profit and EPS growth. What you gain on one-time cost reductions rarely makes up for the erosion of long-term market position, including damage to top-line growth.

Revenue generation is the entire company's responsibility and shouldn't be left solely to sales and marketing.

Boost revenue by focusing on The 3 P's, plus 1:

1. People

Start with marketing and selling skills. Look for natural talent marketers—those who have the "nose" for creative positioning and brand impact—and salespeople who are professional and likable enough to be "invited in" as opposed to being "allowed in" by the customers. Remove friction between marketing and sales and empower them to work well together.

2. Product

Work creatively with R&D to develop the best product and remain cutting-edge

FURTHER READING

HBR, Fred Hassan:
[Leading Change from the Top Line](#)

3. Programs

Build long-term initiatives that strengthen brand value and customer presence. Earning the right to win comes from sustained relevance with customers and it cannot be achieved through advertising alone.

4. Persistence

Drive top line growth over time. Stay the course and don't change strategy at every downturn. Make adjustments, but don't be reactive.

02 LEADING TRANSFORMATION

Spell out the purpose

Alignment starts with clarity. Everyone, from leadership to front-line workers, must understand the goals that must be reached and the why and how behind them. A speech alone won't create alignment. Reinforce the message through ongoing dialogue and engagement.

Define leader behaviors

Culture is shaped by behavior. Set clear expectations for how leaders engage with others.

Identify and instill a few key behaviors that every team can articulate and embody. Examples include shared accountability and transparency, developing others, continuous benchmarking and improvement, and unwavering integrity.

Repetition and clarity are critical. Everyone should be able to repeat and state these leader behaviors with confidence.

Go for the early wins

Start with the low-hanging fruit to generate confidence, enthusiasm, and momentum. Small, visible successes build credibility and encourage buy-in. Winning over front-line workers early on can accelerate transformation across the company.

CASE STUDY

Authenticity

Frustrated with the speed of clinical research, Fred considered having clinical research and drug discovery report directly to him. Before making the change, he turned to a trusted confidant for advice. Instead of offering an opinion, the confidant asked a single question: “Are you an R&D guy?”

Fred knew that he wasn't. Rather than forcing himself into a role he wasn't best suited for, he recognized the solution was hiring the right R&D leader.

Celebrate victories and then raise the bar

Recognize achievements and set new challenges in a way that is not coercive. Inspire people to push themselves to higher standards.

“Don't just raise the bar on people; get them to want to raise their own bar.”

- Fred Hassan

03 CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL LEADERS

Start with self-understanding

Authentic leaders know what drives them. Identify what motivates you—whether it's the joy of learning, making an impact, or feeling valued. The better you understand yourself, the better you can understand others.

“Once you are strong on the inside, you can be strong on the outside. Self-understanding is a strength.”

- Fred Hassan

Leaders who are secure in themselves create environments where people feel comfortable speaking up and being candid. They don't take setbacks or negative feedback personally and bounce back with resilience and determination.

Be clear about who you are and communicate that to your organization. Don't assume that they will figure it out on their own.

CASE STUDY

Modeling Strength

At a recent meeting of one of Fred's boards, a CEO insisted on clearly defining which decisions belonged to management and which belonged to the board. Frustrated by what felt like board overreach, he wanted strict boundaries in writing.

Fred offered a different perspective: *"Focus on the core, not the boundaries. Those who focus on the boundaries are wasting their time. If a board member jumps in with advice on investor relations, take it—you might learn something. Don't see it as an encroachment on your turf."*

Build for the long term

Create a culture that sustains success beyond your tenure. Leave the organization stronger than when you started.

Pressure test assumptions

Define what success looks like at year's end. Then, run scenario exercises to map both best- and worst-case outcomes and put in contingency plans. Knowing when to risk-mitigate an unfavorable development with alacrity, or where to double down fast on an development that exceeds expectations, helps prevent failure or shortens reaction time when challenges arise or favorable events occur.

Live up to the desired behaviours

People commit when they see leaders embody the standards they set. Have the courage to speak up against anything that conflicts with your values. CEOs stand out when they lead with courage.

"Doing the right thing always wins."

- Fred Hassan

Seek feedback

Regularly ask: How am I really doing? What help do I need to improve? Be clear on your strengths and weaknesses. Know where you need support and actively seek it.

Re-recruit your teams

You cannot assume people will stay engaged. Younger employees, in particular, expect alignment with their values and are quick to speak up. To avoid them spreading dissent among colleagues, create an environment where they feel comfortable sharing concerns and then share their contagious enthusiasm as they re-commit.

CLOSING COUNSEL

Personal Goals

“You should be ambitious, but it doesn't have to be on the hierarchy, it could also be on how else you can make your life more meaningful.

You may like a little more personal time for whatever you want to do outside work, and that's fine too, but then you have to make that sacrifice. Make conscious tradeoffs.

Broaden your perspective on your career trajectory. You don't have only to see yourself as a CEO because that is a very low probability given the pyramid in every company. But you can still see yourself as reaching the next level or moving to something that is lateral but might be a more enriching experience.

Be very open to opportunities. Ask yourself, what do you really want?

Don't get stuck in a rut and allow your physical health or family life to suffer. Do the right thing for yourself.

To me, life is the most fun when you're learning and growing.”

- Fred Hassan

Financial success is harder to achieve without strong talent and an aligned culture. Measure the Net Promoter Score of your workforce—does it reflect high-quality management and people's trust in their immediate supervisors? Do people feel they are in a place that wins and has fun?

“Make the people want to come to work on Monday mornings.”

- Fred Hassan

Influence your leaders

Lead by example to change company culture. People respect leaders who respect them. Be patient and avoid lecturing. Over time, your behavior will influence those around you, including your peers and those you report to.

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