

Adding Value as a Key Executive

- Manage Your Time Effectively
- Cultivate the Discipline of Self Review
- Be a Strong Advocate for your Function / Area of Expertise
- Be a Strong Team Player
- Manage the Relationship with your CEO

How do you become a world-class key executive? Based on their experience as TEC Chairs and speakers, Lawrence King and Walter Sutton offer five strategies for adding value to your organisation.

Manage Your Time Effectively

Time management for senior executives doesn't just mean getting more organised. It also involves making sure that you spend your time in the highest-impact areas. King recommends a simple but highly effective process called "time auditing" to ensure that you work on the right things.

First, ask yourself three questions:

- In my position, what are the six most important things I do (or should be doing) each month?
- What are the six most important things I do (or should be doing) to build and lead my team/department?
- Is there any overlap between these two lists?

Next, take out your calendar and examine the relationship between your most important things and where you spend your time. When you find large gaps, adjust accordingly. King also recommends reading "The Effective Executive," by Peter Drucker, which talks about the importance of doing the right things, not just doing things right.

Cultivate the Discipline of Self Review

Plato originally said the unexamined life is not worth living. King believes that key executives should follow the same code of conduct by engaging in self one-to-ones on a monthly basis.

- Once a month, schedule a one-to-one with yourself. Schedule it into your calendar and show up at the appointed time.
- Create an agenda for each self one-to-one and bring the tools of your trade – laptop, note pad, sales reports, monthly financials or whatever you need to get the job done.
- During your work time, create a list of the most important things you will accomplish during the next 30 days and how you will accomplish them.
- At the beginning of your next self one-to-one, review your list, check off what you actually accomplished and write down the steps you need to take to complete any unfinished items.

"Experiment with where and when to conduct your self one-to-ones," suggests King. "At home, in the library, a cozy corner in a restaurant or coffee shop – anywhere away from your office that you feel comfortable and can work, without interruption, on the most important things you need to get done every month. Keep in mind that learning doesn't occur in writing to-do lists, it occurs in reviewing the things you have and have not accomplished and looking for ways to improve them."

Be a Strong Advocate for your Function / Area of Expertise

Although key executives tend to perform well in their technical areas, Sutton believes that most do not do a good job of advocating for their part of the business. To improve your value as a key executive, become an appropriate advocate for finance, sales, human resources or whatever function you happen to represent. Advocating your position doesn't mean playing politics or engaging in turf-defending activities. Instead, says Sutton, it means articulating the value your department/functional area brings to the organisation and making sure your point of view gets heard and acknowledged by the CEO and others on the management team.

"People joke about the conservative nature of CFOs, yet that's a very healthy attitude to have around the table," explains Sutton. "Even in a wild start-up, somebody has to think and act conservatively. But if the CFO doesn't advocate for his or her function, that opinion doesn't get represented at the table and the entire organisation loses. In strong organisations, all the functions get represented equally at the table. The key is to do it in a way that supports the team as opposed to fractionalising it."

Be a Strong Team Player

As a key executive, you must perform at a high level on two different teams – the management team you're a part of and the team of people who work for you. According to Sutton, serving the management team well requires answering the following questions:

- What are the rules for playing on this team?
- What, specifically, are we trying to accomplish as a team and how can we do it better?
- What do I contribute to the team and what are your expectations for me?

"If the CEO doesn't address these questions up front, don't hesitate to ask," advises Sutton. "You can't play the game if you don't know the rules."

Building a high-performing team of people underneath you requires understanding the fundamental rules of team-building.

Manage the Relationship with your CEO

Perhaps the most important thing you can do, for your own benefit as well as that of the organisation, is to manage the dynamic relationship between yourself and your boss. Don't abdicate that responsibility to your CEO. Instead, push the relationship as needed and develop one that represents your views and needs with authenticity and integrity.

"In order to manage the relationship, you first have to know the rules of the game," explains Sutton. "However, many CEOs don't understand this critical point, so if your CEO doesn't explain the rules, don't be afraid to push in that area. You can't manage the relationship if you don't know what your CEO wants from you and how he or she expects you to play the game."

King agrees. He also acknowledges that many CEOs can intimidate their direct reports, either consciously or unconsciously.

"CEOs typically cast a long shadow," admits King. "Some have very aggressive, domineering personalities, but others can intimidate by the amount of hours they work, the problems they take on and their level of intensity. As a result, key executives are often never quite sure where they are invited into, what they should and shouldn't do or where they should move forward or hold back.

"Ultimately, your effectiveness as a key executive begins and ends with your level of clarity around the CEO's goals and objectives and how you fit into achieving them. You can sit back and say 'Yes, boss, whatever you want,' and hope that you hit the target. Or, you can take charge of the relationship and get what you need to succeed."