

confessions!

The 39 lashes of a French turnaround executive

You have permission to print this. The right to make changes or edits to its contents or digital format, to translate it or to bind this and sell it as a book, however, is strictly reserved.

- by Erik Van Rompay -

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

This is not a handbook

Neither a set of rules

Neither a guideline to follow

Neither a vision of business ...

This is not a biography

Neither a fiction

Neither a fantasy

Neither a story to glory executives

This is not one single story

But the result of 4 difficult missions

Written like a blog

Representing our fragmented world

This is ... about business life

Imperfect, rough and hard

With lots of hidden truths and treason

It is just a normal turnaround mission.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

FOREWORD

Every book has a foreword so I feel obliged. Except I don't believe in asking someone to tell me this book is great. This book has not the intention to be great or fabulous or to tell me I did a great job. This is just a record of some of the things that happened during my 4 turnaround missions.

You can have 2 kinds of executives. The first one speaks nicely and sells visions - the second one that acts. I am one of them the people that act. I could have turned this book into a Hollywood-like thriller but it would just have created a kind of fiction style while the book contains a real "bumpy" road story with all ingredients of corporate life like power plays, corruption, treason, spy games, survival tricks and even some sex manoeuvres.

To keep this book an authentic testimony and not to influence the content, nobody has read it before - not even to touch it to get "perfect English". Nothing in life is perfect so this book just confirms reality.

Have fun reading it and don't think every turnaround executive has these kinds of rough experiences. At least, I don't hope so.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

About the author

I am an executive (actually CEO) specialized in the rescuing of High-Tech companies through the executing of difficult turnarounds and the using of the Internet power.

I was born in 1962 in the suburbs of a major industrial town and graduated as Civil Engineer in 1985. The working on major international Projects for Ford Motor Co, Volvo and Euro Disney gave me quickly an expertise in implementing innovating projects in multi-cultural environments. It also allowed me to take more and more responsibilities in daily operations and to lead difficult projects.

Actually Turnaround President of a software house in France, my turnaround missions forced me to assure one by one all upper management positions in a company.

I adore this complex mixture of forcing innovation, changing habits, taking of quick decisions without accurate data, implementing forced layoffs... and at the same time executing the industrialisation of work methods, the reating new sales activities, the recruiting to expand and the writing of detailed reports for my Fortune 250 shareholders...

Agile and business savvy, each mission is for me a challenge to survive a new, rough and difficult experience.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

The 39 testimonies of a French Turnaround Executive

<i>About the author</i>	4
<i>Introduction</i>	7
Chapter 1: Starting the job	9
1. <i>Detecting the board-liars</i>	9
2. <i>What's my number?</i>	11
3. <i>Smile, but never joke</i>	13
4. <i>Be the strange guy</i>	15
5. <i>The Hands-on everybody nobody.</i>	17
6. <i>First weeks: ... Ignition!</i>	19
7. <i>War Games</i>	21
8. <i>Using forbidden strategies</i>	24
9. <i>Never promise things. Just do it</i>	27
10. <i>Go for speed, never for perfection</i>	30
11. <i>Behaving like a small giant</i>	32
12. <i>Creating an enemy</i>	35
13. <i>While God created Sundays, France created the hourweek</i>	38
Chapter 2: Hidden work methods	40
14. <i>One and One makes...twenty</i>	40
15. <i>Counting the cups of coffee (this one hurts!)</i>	42
16. <i>Eliminating Weak Performers</i>	44
17. <i>Do not push dirt - Clean it!</i>	46
18. <i>Finding the right trigger</i>	58
19. <i>Igniting my own business models</i>	51
Chapter 3: It's called Skill set	55
19. <i>Opportunity licking</i>	57
20. <i>Being the corporate communication channel</i>	58

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

21. <i>Creating your own rumours</i>	59
22. <i>Forcing Innovation</i>	61
23. <i>Taking leadership</i>	65
24. <i>Asking the questions you know</i>	68
25. <i>Creating incidents</i>	70
26. <i>Burning the house down!</i>	72
27. <i>Portfolio problems</i>	74
28. <i>Disaster recovery roadmap</i>	76
29. <i>A smile to destroy resistance</i>	79
30. <i>Do they know I am right?</i>	81
Chapter 4: Lifestyle	85
31. <i>Job around the dock</i>	86
32. <i>Sex as business weapon</i>	88
33. <i>Changing shirts fast</i>	90
34. <i>High-speed rescues</i>	92
35. <i>Sleeping like a baby</i>	94
36. <i>Protect your ass as the heat is on!</i>	96
37. <i>Impossible Self-training</i>	100
38. <i>The Lone Rider</i>	103
39. <i>Dying without flowers</i>	105
40. <i>Epilogue</i>	108

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Introduction

More and more groups struggle to maintain profitability, to maintain their market presence or expand by integrating new activities. These strategic expansion plans or recent acquisitions did not deliver the expected results and increased the fragility of the company.

Not to forget that permanent rising competition, nervous markets, burned-out executives, the arriving of low-cost labour costs with the European expansion and increasing social advantages created a climate where things need to change very fast if a company wants to survive. A big bang is needed and the call for a strong corporate renewal professional is more than critical.

Operating in the eye of the storm, I have to deal equitably with angry shareholders, frightened employees, wary customers, stupid legislations and the resistance of some board members. Everything is turning at a huge speed around me, ready to destroy the company and me. All forces are against, but I manage to do the unexpected... create renewal.

But this is the kind of assignment I like – extremely difficult, fast paced and not for the faint-hearted. My past 4 missions delivered extremely good results but it was hard, extremely hard as I received at each mission the 39 lashes of the corporate world. In each case and don't ask me why, I managed to create business survival – and in 3 cases even market leadership.

At the end of each mission, I thought I saw everything imaginable but no, at each mission, I discovered a new set of 39 tortures. Every turnaround job seems to be a unique survival case.

This document is not a handbook neither a set of items you should try. It is just a testimony on things that happened. I don't know why I reacted in that particular way but I did it as I felt it was the best thing to do. Use my lessons (or do I have to say lesions) to make you think about your own management style and the behaviour you can have to keep your business running in difficult times.

I translated the 39 corporate lashes into 39 confessions as in a lot of cases, I did things differently than the classical business practices – and I presented each of them with 3 of my field experiences.

Never forget that a turnaround executive is an angel; send from above with the mission to transform HELL into HEAVEN and there is no stairway to escape. He has no other solution than transforming hell into a nice destination.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Concerning lifestyle, I like is the following saying: "A turnaround is the one that jumps out of an airplane without a parachute but it does not bother him as he knows he can rely on his skill set and experiences to find THE necessary solution before touching the ground."

Ready to jump into the coloured world of turnaround businesses?

Turn the page and enter the tough, hidden world of business renewal...

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: **+44 203 137 2581**

Email: **search@ceo-worldwide.com**

Website: **www.ceo-worldwide.com**

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

Chapter 1: Starting the job

1. Detecting the board-liars

A company only calls in a turnaround executive if they find themselves in deep, deep trouble. Only in one mission, I got the right information from the shareholders. In all other cases, the executives and shareholders created their own vision, telling me a story far away from the truth. Some of them wanted me to fail; others transformed the truth to make me accept the assignment.

Up to me to discover each time the real reason why they contacted me, as there can only be 4 following business reasons:

- *Financial Turnaround*
- *Product/Service Turnaround*
- *Market Turnaround*
- *Organizational Turnaround*

It is extremely important for me to understand exactly which of these 4 problems I have to fix. I can't forget that shareholders can pick me to fail, just for their own ego as my failure proves they were good executives themselves (Can you imagine the specialist is doing worse than they did before!). On the other hand, they can also want me to fix everything at the same time but due to the crisis situation, I can only serve one single cause. As I mentioned many times, I am there to fix the company, not the light bolts. If I have the opportunity to meet several people of the board to discuss my future mission, I am filtering their sayings to detect the most critical item to execute. Picking the wrong one means I am doomed before I started. And failure is something I can't permit.

Field experience one: so-called Communication Turnaround = heavy layoffs

I was called in this time to fix important service problems between a 20 head subsidiary and its customers due to major communication problems. So my mission was to solve the “people” problem and implement some good communication channels. When I arrived on the premises, I discovered not

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

20 but 55 people. When I got the vice president on the phone some minutes later, he told me that they didn't want to tell me that my real mission was to implement a layoff plan to arrive in the end with a headcount of 20 people, the point where they would be financially secure.

So I started a heavy restructuring program to implement a smoother organization allowing me to keep the same service quality but at the same time, reduce the staff numbers. I arrived to 23 people (or a decrease by 54%) still with the same service delivery but still losing a little money.

Field experience two: so-called Service Turnaround = Organizational Turnaround

I was called in to fix important problems with an extremely low performing IT service delivery department and to replace the existing team of 60 people with subcontractors, as they were completely incompetent. At least, that was the thing suggested in a crisis report written by a Big Five consultancy office. After a 2-day audit (things had to go fast), I have identified the problem as a huge bunch of coordination problems and the lack of investment in technical equipment – but the team was good. Two days later, I presented my action plan based on extra investments in material and some new service items. As my action plan needed to be compliant with the Big Five report, my suggestion was somewhat Machiavellian as I asked the delaying of the layoffs by 6 months, just to create an environment suitable to welcome the new subcontractors. In the next 6 months, I changed completely the service infrastructure and IT delivery but as the problems disappeared, I kept the same team on board.

Field experience three: so-called Organizational Turnaround = company closure

I was hired to fix a problem with extremely weak performing managers and to replace all of them in the next 15 to 30 days. I had one week to identify key employees that, through internal promotion, could take the place of these managers. In reality, the problem was not with the managers that were key people in the survival of the company but with some of shareholders that wanted the bankruptcy of the company so they could buy the customer base at a low price to create a new company. I did not follow the shareholders' orders as I kept the managers. I started instead with a complete financial turnaround – followed two months later by a service delivery turnaround and one year later with a market turnaround giving us full market leadership after 18 months.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Personal thoughts: I still wonder why shareholders present me a different situation. The only answer I can give is that the corporate power play already starts with the selection of a turnaround executive and the delivering of inaccurate information is part of the tactical game. I know rather quickly when they are lying and that I am part of their power play so I don't say anything as I need a job to make my living.

2. What's my number?

Before arriving in the company, you have to know the background of the company and what happened before.

You also have to understand that most CEO's or company presidents don't relinquish power easily. Often their egos make it too hard for them to admit "troubled situations". So they start with an internal promotion that fails. In a second step, they call in a renowned consulting service to get some un-experienced interim managers (I never met a consultant that could save a company). In a last effort, when thing can't go worse any more, they go to the real turnaround executive. So each turnaround executive has to find out what happened before he arrives in hell.

Field experience one: Welcome number Six

On my first day of a mission, I was presented to the different managers and one of them joked to me with a "welcome number six". Easy to understand I was the sixth turnaround manager arriving on the premises and this only in 4 months time.

Six is a lot so I suddenly knew the mission was going to be extremely complex and I also knew the people in the company did not expect me to survive longer than a week. What I found out later was that it became a game for them as they were betting on the number of days I was going to stay. The average expectation of my stay was 3 days with one guy estimating it to two weeks.

In fact, I realised to stay 17 months and not only turned around the crisis situation but also created a certain market leadership (ranked number 3 in a global user satisfaction survey).

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience two: A brand new team... or no team at all

The turnaround mission was presented to me as an easy job with just some people issues to handle between managers. In fact, the previous executive did not agree with his layoff and he has taken many actions to destroy the company. As he had the time, he replaced the whole IT development team before my arrival so I found myself in a software house with a brand new IT team that did not know the core business. There has never been any transfer of critical information so everything was empty and broken so I was forced to start an important re-engineering effort to get the team learn the business, get on speed and to start developing new software features.

Field experience three: Changing yourself

It is extremely difficult to change the first perception people created of you. In one of my missions, I created the image of being a very strong business manager as it was a necessity for the first six months.

Unfortunately, after 6 months, and all financial problems behind us, people in the company wanted a very technical-innovation oriented executive. The proposals I made to develop the company were instantly considered as “financially-focused” or innovations that would bring in quick cash. What they requested was a pure IT technology vision and they send a clear message to the shareholders.

To calm things down, the shareholders announced the end my mission but we agreed to keep me temporarily on the job to assure a smooth transition.

Because I had nothing to loose, I decided to try to change my image like an actor playing a new role without changing really myself. I decided to reshape certain of my behaviours that have been part of me since several years.

I changed the type of pants I was wearing (arrived in the office in jeans and sneakers), I spoke about the things my children were doing and so on. In the evening, I read a lot about latest technological innovations so I could create a global technical framework for the company. I then shared with everybody my personal vision of our next generation of software applications – and this time, the message passed.

While people continued asking me when I was leaving, I continued to work, improve business processes. My time to departure took much longer than announced so I continued working on the company, improve business processes and create a financial secure environment.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Eight months later, at the official end of my turnaround mission, people were asking me why I was leaving, as they needed a designer for the future.

Personal thoughts: every turnaround executive is coming in to replace an existing executive or his arrival will blocking someone who was considering himself fit for the position.

I don't care about this, as this is part of business life. Internal promotions are important but in all my missions, the person that thought to be fit for the job, were completely unsuitable.

Unfortunately, in too many cases, the person that needed to save the company got internally promoted not for his/her skills but by the simple fact that he/she was close to one of the board executives. This can lead to extremely bad consequences on the performance of the company and create the awareness to call in a real turnaround executive.

3. Smile, but never joke

The problem with being an executive is that you need to inspire confidence. People listen to you, the way you express words, feelings. They look to the way you move and how you interact with other people.

It is important to give that confidence by having a hard-working attitude but always with a smile on your face. A smile means you master the situation and you resist the stress created by your mission.

Walking a little faster than others in the hallways means you are busy and assured in what you are doing. This also creates confidence.

The only problem is you never can tell jokes.

Field experience one: Silly Step dancing-joke

I received on a Saturday a phone call from my help desk as one of our clients had a problem with his specialized printer. I asked if he had done all the tests, which he did, so we had to send him a spare printer. The problem was that this client wanted it instantly while we could only deliver it with an overnight service delivery.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

I told the help desk operator to repeat to the client that we were respecting the contract conditions so he would receive a spare printer the next day. The helpdesk operator mentioned me the guy on the phone was furious so I confirmed the helpdesk guy that he needed to stay polite and kind. And to finish with a joke to make the operator laugh, I told him... if the client continues to shout, to try some step-dancing to entertain him.

That Monday, I got a letter from my clients' lawyer telling me the ending of the contract as our helpdesk refused to solve his problem and instead, on recommendation by the general management, started step-dancing.

I did not only loose a client but I also needed to take a lawyer to finish quickly the consequences of my tiny joke.

Field experience two: No problem – we just move the 'Notre Dame of Paris'

When I was working on a major urban development scheme, I had a difficult project meeting with several government agencies as some mistakes were made with the localisations of several buildings and railroads. The reason was that the different agencies around the table were all using different geographical references. After 2 hours negotiating, cleaning and modifying all data, we still had a mistake of 1 meter and nobody wanted to change their drawings. In a last effort to improve the atmosphere, I joked by saying we could keep the same drawings if we moved the Notre Dame of Paris by 1 meter (which is the zero point of one of the geographical coordinate systems). Some smiles on the faces and we all left the meeting without a solution.

The next day, we received a call from the office of the French prime minister mentioning that our intention to move the Notre Dame was unacceptable. I had to apologize in writing in the next 15 minutes or my joke turned into a political conflict.

Field experience three: Handicapped IT team

Responsible for General Services and Security, I was working in a public building and we had a review of the building infrastructure and its use. One of the things the inspector noticed was the intensive use of the elevators created for handicapped people while there were no handicapped people on the premises. After exchanging some possible explanations, I told the inspectors that it was probably the IT desktop team that was using intensively these elevators when moving around their desktops as the

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

elevators for the handicapped people were easy to use with their carts and always available. The inspectors mentioned that the infrastructures had to be exclusively reserved for handicapped people. I replied by saying there was no problem as I was going to cut of their hands so they could still use the elevator to transport their desktops. It created a lot of laughing around the table.

The next day, I had to explain to the whole desktop team and in presence of some union members, that I was joking, as I was not going to cut of their hands. The meeting took more than 1 hour so it was a serious conflict for them. I avoided by little a strike.

Personal thoughts: It is extremely difficult to be an executive as your actions, talks and moves are monitored constantly. You have to be human but control your behaviours like a robot. You have to give a relaxed impression, but you can never be too relaxed as the smallest joke can turn quickly into a political conflict or the loss of a major client.

4. Be the strange guy

Everyone in the company considers a turnaround executive as “extremely expensive” so rumours will circulate even before you arrive. And because the company has to pay the turnaround executive, there will be, according to the rumours, no raises and a layoff plan will arrive somewhere 6 weeks after his arrival.

The only strategy you can take is to disturb all of these rumours with your attitude. There are easy examples you can use – like driving a small company car, limiting extremely your restaurant bills and make these numbers public. The use of words is also important – like never use layoffs but use the word “job-saving”.

It is also important to share as many meals as possible with your employees by going to the same canteen – so people can see you are sharing basic things with them.

Field experience one: My bedroom in the office

You can disturb people with your engagement by arriving as first one in the morning and leaving as last one in the evening. In one of my missions, I even took a hotel room in the same building as the corporate office. It took me 35 seconds to arrive in the office!

So people wondered who I was – living in the office and not seeing my family during the week.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

In another mission, I was working in a global environment where my teams knew they could call me at any time. This disturbed them as I was taking in hand all troubles, difficult customer issues and this 24 hours a day. So I have been answering critical mails at 3a.m. in the morning in Asia to solve problems in the UK. The clients were happy as they saw a high-engaged executive and the teams saw their boss was present to help them.

Field experience two: Weird passion

Everyone has a passion – but a lot of the executives have the reputation to live just for their job or have an exclusive passion typical for executives.

You should tell people about your passion as it makes you human – but you should hide a part of the truth to make it magic. I once recruited an executive whose passion was to buy paintings from new artists. Normal people can't invest in paintings so I told him to tell everyone his passion was to see paintings in galleries and museums – but never mention he owned a collection. He followed my recommendation in the beginning but mentioned after 6 months he had a collection. From that day, he created a gap between himself and the rest of the team.

On my side, everyone knows I love Ford Mustang cars (but you don't see any in France) and I follow Nascar racing (even more weird for a European). And above that, I am driving a normal small family car. Result, I am known as a car lover but with a different taste. The fact I don't invest in cars brings me closer to the team.

Field experience three: Mickey ears

My management style is also something that disturbs. As I grew up in Disney (5 fast but wonderful years), I still have the Mickey ears but I also passed through INSEAD and learned a lot from my experiences in the UK before I turned into a turnaround executive. Result, my management style is a mixture of different cultures and I disturb a lot all-corporate habits and I know it.

In each of my 4 missions, one of the executives started reading books on the way Disney creates managers or how turnaround executives in the US resolve their missions in the hope to find the secret of my behaviour patters so they could block my initiatives. At the end of my missions, they told me that their reading did not help them to forecast my behaviour or even give them an idea on how to

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

stop some of my initiatives. I'm flattered with these remarks, as I know I disturbed them but at the same time, did the things that needed to be done for the company.

Personal thoughts: It is weird to take attention on all details and especially on those elements that can make a difference inside the team. I have to present myself as an American if I want to launch our marketing campaigns (please be aggressive guys !!!) and French as we receive customers (please where is the French hospitality). I have to English if we write down quality procedures... and present the Olympic spirit when restructuring the company (participating to my key initiatives is key ... at least in the beginning before I push the team to go for the medals).

5. The Hands-on everybody nobody.

As turnaround executive, you cannot be like another executive. You have to be everybody and nobody. You have to rule by example and not manage behind your desk (unless this is part of your turnaround strategy). People have to see you are working, as this is the only way for them to keep their motivation.

I hate to close the door of my office but sometimes, I have to do it especially if I am receiving the representative of the bank, the unions or even during some difficult discussions with a staff member. In these circumstances, I can't leave the door open but I know the team considers as me having a break.

I also take care to be easy accessible from the hallway so people are not obliged to pass the barrier of my personal assistant.

But every time I have to close my office door, I know I have to prove to the staff that I have been working.

Field experience one: Hear me working

A lot of the hands-on items are small items that everyone can do but as we are in a turnaround situation, a lot of people do not take the initiative and blame the board.

Being hands-on means you solve the problem yourself every time you see something wrong. Someone dropped a cup of coffee – get something to clean it. And if you have the towel, make some noise so people will notice it you are working. The coffee machine has a problem – put a sheet on it

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

mentioning you called for an intervention. And when you wrote the text on the sheet, do it in an open space and repeat the text at a low voice so people start questioning what you are doing. If the garbage basket next to the photocopy machine is full, take it down to empty it but don't forget to hit it slightly against some object so people notice you are emptying it. Also, if you find a paper on the floor, take it, crumble it so they notice (or at least hear) you are working.

Field experience two: The T-shirt executive

It was my first day inside the company when a truck delivered 13 brand new desktops at 6.p.m. in the evening. These needed to be installed for a new team arriving the next morning so there was an extreme urgency. The IT technicians were not happy at all to make extra hours but they were surprised seeing me taking off my tie and my shirt to put on a clean T-Shirt and this to help them install these 13 desktops. I was not technically qualified but I moved these boxes, put the equipment on the desk and wired them. It saved the team time and it allowed them to concentrate on the installation of the software packages.

The next morning (my second day on the job) the rumour went around in the whole company that I was strong in moving boxes and that I was already pushing my team at my first day in the company.

Field experience three: Office Moving

An office move is something that disturbs people as it means a change to their existing behaviours. It is normal to see an executive sponsoring such a kind of project but in my case, I am organising everything. I am not only selecting the subcontractors but I am also the person drawing the office layout. An executive that can make drawings and speak to everyone to optimise the internal layout is something particular. I also assure them not to worry, as designing a Disney park is more complicated than moving some desks around.

On the moving day itself, people find me taping and moving boxes, connecting desktops, fixing minor problems and so on. The day after the moving, I am the one that goes around the office with a toolbox to fix things and to put some posters/tables/boards on the walls. Not to forget asking everyone if they have still some unsolved moving issues on hand.

This is being hands-on. Working for the benefit of all employees.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide eBook

Personal thoughts: It is not a special effort for me but a normal thing to do. You have to be there for the people and my acting shows my engagement. Everybody knows that if I start something, I will finish it. So if I am here to restructure the company – I will finish my job.

6. First weeks: ... Ignition!

You must spend the first days fact-finding and diagnosing the scope and severity of the company's illness. How long can the company survive before you must hit your first success?

Is it one week, a month, 3 months? The shortest survival period I had experienced was ... 3 hours so direct action was needed but in most cases, I could survive 2 to 4 months.

What activity is viable, can be redressed quickly or needs extra funding? Who is in the team, what are they doing and how are they performing?

Field experience one: Act as a one-day Hero

The first day is extremely crucial when you meet for the first time people – so you have to win instantly the respect of the power players inside the company.

You have to act as if you were their hero, the person that will save them – just by listening to them.

You also have to smile a lot the first day, but never tell a joke as you will not longer be considered serious. Only drink one cup of coffee, even if you are used to drink a lot. If you drink more than one the first day, you are considered as “under-stress”. I maintain this “one cup” the whole first week, and start drinking 5 cups a day the second week. I don't smoke (yet) so that is no problem for me.

Even if you know things you can do quickly, tell them you have a lot of experience but that you need to understand their business first and not the one that you collected through the shareholders (as the shareholders are the bad guys in the company so the whole team is noticing that you are creating your own opinion, independently from all exterior forces. My favourite question is to ask each supervisor the 3 items they want to change in their daily operations that would really change their lives. At the end of the day, I have a complete action plan for my first 6 weeks and enough elements to ignite the restructuring of the company. Also with this, they notice I took their remarks seriously so I created a first (fragile) communication flow towards myself.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience two: Analysis tools to master the "tunnel"

There are a lot of ways to learn fast the company and to create the right action plan. Depending on the situation, I am using different tools to audit the existing resources like people, processes, methodologies, existing service delivery infrastructure and a financial analysis. The tools I master is Cobit, Prince2, a several tools/tables I collected from different consultant offices and something I retrieved from a Harvard course. I am starting my first operations from week two (just the time to learn the people with their skills and abilities) and I start creating an action plan of around 80 pages, which I present to the board 6 weeks after my arrival. From day one, I count the number of actions to be realised and put this into a counter. So at the second week of my mission, I already publish to the shareholders the number of points we reached in my action plan – and I communicate it every 2 weeks indicating the turnaround progression.

Without this progress indicator, it is difficult to keep your motivation but it also shows to the shareholders that things are moving ahead. For them, it is difficult to know where you are. You entered the tunnel to restructure things but you are somewhere inside and they don't know where you are and when you could be getting out of this black tunnel. They probably don't see noticeable improvements but with this scorecard, they know you are moving ahead as you went from point 32 to 36. It also gives the impression that things are moving ahead in a structured way and this is what convinces shareholders.

Field experience three: Calling in Experts

I am not keen in calling in many experts as they are expensive and in most cases, my financial situation does not allow a weak report. So I prefer to find out myself the truth unless I really need the help of real experts.

Working for an eBusiness platform, I had detected the first day a major problem between the in-house software development team and the people of IT operations. They blamed each other of incompetence causing a fragile eBusiness Platform. As I am not a database expert, I called in Microsoft Consulting to analyse the problem. The result of their audit was that both teams did a great job and this report stopped the internal blaming and they started working hand in hand on a new database design, a new technical architecture creating a higher reliability.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Personal thoughts: It is important to start fast as time is against you and you have to catch up cash. It is easy to listen to all people to list their suggestions and remarks and create your first action plan that you execute in the following days. As people get the confirmation you listened to them, they give you some credits and will follow you – at least for some time. It is in the first day you can decide on the winning of the turnaround battle.

7. War Games

One of the key issues of controlling a company is to control and master the different power fields in a company. It is complex to do it continuously but it is key to master it at major turnaround moments like the moments when you announce a big change or when you introduce a new major IT system. Power players are not the people that are visible or can be heard in every meeting – they are people that control...

Reading socio dynamic studies or THE ART OF WAR of Sun Tzu can give you some insights but you have to master each detail of it.

You have to detect the people that will help you with the different actions in your mission and those that will not act. There are the ones that say they will help you but are negative towards you and those that say nothing but are positive towards you and are just waiting to be asked to move ahead. An extremely complex situation that does not makes things easy.

The most important group you need to control is the “wait and see” group. They are waiting to take a decision and it is important that they hear and see things moving. Once they take the decision to move, you have won your turnaround mission as the people that are against you, will become quiet as they don’t want to be isolated.

But constantly watch out for foxes, disguised wolves and spies.

Field experience one: who’s spying who?

Information technology makes it complicated to track all discussions and underlying communication channels. Do you know what happens with instant messaging inside your company? Did people create their own mailing lists so they can send mass mailings around against your initiatives?

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen’s Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

So I got my spy. A person that forwarded me all mails that were send against me so I was aware of a lot of issues and could change my messages accordingly.

But everyone knows you cannot trust a spy so I took a second person as a spy and indeed, this second spy transmitted me mails of my first spy who was also sending messages around against my initiatives.

Roughly said, I was unpopular but at least I knew what discussion issues were going on and their discussion items.

To disable these rumours, I intensified all informal discussions by spending more time at the coffee machine to announce and explain them in detail my action plans. I also spend more time at the photocopy machine to pass some messages to the assistants.

People were nicely surprised to see me handle basic issues that were important for them and that I was open to discuss simple issues.

(Note: I never waited for the unions to come up with remarks. By addressing issues as quickly as they appeared, the unions never had enough items to create a serious resistance).

Field experience two: bombarding resistance

In one of my missions, I had to deploy an important project and I needed a maximum of resources available. As one of the business units was also using our IT services and their manager was against my deployment, I could not ask this unit or its boss to lower down their business activity. I also knew the female boss of this unit would take the time to criticize me intensively during this deployment.

So I created a devilish action plan with the implementation of new quality procedures and forms to fill in. As everyone saw immediately the benefits of this initiative, it became a group project and I asked the CEO to have the head of this business unit (the enemy of my deployment project) to take charge of the team as she was a good resource for the project and I would join her afterwards once my deployment finished. The second advantage of this initiative was that it would create intensive discussions between several of my opponents giving me sufficient space to deploy quietly my project. The CEO accepted and it worked out fine as she was completely occupied with this “corporate” project. During the next 4 weeks, she didn’t had the time to call our services so we could execute our job with a smashing success as the whole team got a congratulation bonus for our excellent deployment.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen’s Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Two weeks later, I joined the group initiative and became project leader some weeks later. Occupying the enemy was the strategy that worked fine for this particular project.

Field experience three: Annual Salary Review

Annual salary reviews are hell as you have to negotiate with everybody and especially as you are working under a very difficult situation. As turnaround executive, you are handling several cost-cutting initiatives and suddenly, you have to dedicate the so-hard gained cash to salary increases.

Because I knew the opposition was strong and rumours were starting, I decided to act. In a first wave, I got the results of a very recent market survey on the salary levels and after verification; I knew 95% of the staff was slightly above the market value. So I arrived extremely early in the morning in the office and I putted copies on all desks so everyone had the information.

The second wave came the next day with a pamphlet that I put on some bulletin board indicating the average salary increase in our industry was 2% - while people were expecting 5 to 6%.

One week later, I got the financial report of the accounting office confirming on one side the major performance improvements we made but it also included a phrase we needed some urgent extra cost-cuttings and suggested even some layoffs to make the company financially secure. Of course, I also forgot (that's how we call it) some copies of some pages at the copy machine so some bypassing people could distribute the rumours around.

One week later, the unions accepted my proposition not to give any salary increases in exchange of avoiding layoffs.

My game allowed me to finish the annual salary review with a limited increase of 0,3% completely focused to align some underpaid people.

Personal thoughts: It is not easy to execute war games especially as they can get very tricky. At many occasions, I am considering if I am doing the right thing for the people in the company – and so also for the company. It is important for me to do it in this order.

I would love to give everybody a raise of 10%, but not if this forces me as executive to layoff 10% of all employees. In two occasions, I refused to collect my first year bonus so the money could be shared as a raise amongst all employees. But I never got any gratitude for that.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

8. Using forbidden strategies

There are four strategies that are forbidden for turnaround executives – and every specialist will tell you their inefficiency. So it is interesting for me to use them in very particular cases to force certain decisions.

The first one is the “kamikaze” strategy that consists to run a project if nothing could happen. As your mission is to save the company, you run the project in a fast result spirit of “it works or I die”.

The second one is the “participation” strategy. To solve a problem, you create project groups, user groups, discussion groups... In almost all cases, they never give a result as there are too many power players. If you want to stop an important user project inside your turnaround program, this strategy could be perfect as you will not be blamed for its failure and if you play it properly, can take it over at your advantage.

The third dangerous strategy is the “Arch of Noah” where you decide to work only with the most enthusiastic people ready to follow you at any price. This is dangerous as you need to create a shared awareness of the success of your turnaround mission.

The fourth one is to use a Machiavellian strategy to create a personal network with each person and to manipulate each of these relationships differently. It creates hidden forces of thinking and decision-making. The problem is that you need to be and stay in the centre of all discussions and avoid the creation of discussions inside the company. I never used this as I always arrived in an environment with lots of rumours and I just enforced internal discussions to solve the problems.

Field experience one: Changing of a messaging project (Participation project)

Inside a high communicative environment, the messaging system was one of the most crucial internal systems that needed quick replacement. As everyone had its own opinion, no decision could be taken bringing the company in difficulties. I created user groups to analyse the different products, and as foreseen, everyone had eternal discussions and the project stopped giving me a white card to force the implementation I wanted.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience two: Creating of a business unit.

As we needed to redefine the packaging of one of our failing software products, I created a project team with enthusiastic people to put things straight. They advanced quickly but they did not communicate with other product teams. In the end, they proposed their solution to create a market-winning product..., which was immediately counterattacked by the other product teams – that gained support of the finance team - as they were not aware of the business case and wanted to stop this product line. The reason why I used this strategy was to obtain a very strong business case for this “failing” software package and especially, create an important internal conflict allowing me to separate this unit from the rest of the company by selling it to a live fund that created a dedicated company. The whole team got transferred which was good news as everybody kept his job – which was not the thing we imagined in the beginning. It was also important for us as we received some cash we urgently needed for the rest of the company.

Field experience three: The new online kamikaze platform

We had a major problem as our online platform was very fragile and could not function under high stress. As we won a major bid, we had to implement a new system in a 2-months time gap. The only solution I saw was to buy latest file-servers as they are more powerful than our 14 month-old infrastructure. But 2 months is extremely short so we did everything possible and we got the machines installed during the night of our big event. It was a difficult decision – staying with the old infrastructure would be a technical disaster while the new infrastructure was not even installed 2 hours without any testing, stress-control or even user-experience testing. We didn't even test if our electronic payment system was working so we had an enormous big financial risk.

I decided to go online and take the risk – and it was scary as our promotion got more than 10.000 paid orders in less than 30 minutes without even knowing what was happening. I was happy to receive at the end of the 30 minutes a call of our bank asking it was normal we were collecting a huge amount of money... so I knew we collected at least some money.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Personal thoughts: As mentioned, watch out when using forbidden strategies. Above are just 3 examples that worked out well for me but I got also several times in deep troubles as things got completely out of hand (but that was before I became a turnaround manager).

9. Never promise things. Just do it

People do not really know what to expect from a turnaround executive and they all have heard stories that make them dislike upper management. They have been told the company has some minor problems but this would soon be over. The previous managers also mentioned that this team was the best they've ever seen, the real force and assets of the company. So they saw the first layoffs but they were told there would not be any other staff reductions... but they saw a second wave and perhaps even a third wave of layoffs.

Result, the people consider executives as born liars, or guys that are there to grab as much money as possible before they disappear and a brand new white-collar executive appears doing exactly the same thing.

And your fresh arrival – announced as the big guy that is going to solve at last all problems -can only confirm their feelings and expectations.

To be clear with everyone from the very beginning... I never promise things. I am not forecasting a way to corporate survival, to keep all jobs and product lines... that they are the best team I've ever seen. I am just telling everyone that we are in a battle that starts all over every morning and everyone has to keep in mind the Nike slogan ... "Just do it".

Every morning, we all have to stand up and say – I am going to do it – and every evening, we have to fall asleep saying... tomorrow, I am going to do the rest.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience one: Assignment interview

When I meet some board members for a first discussion on a new mission, they always ask me my ingredients for my success. What makes it that I finish successfully my missions where others fail.

My answer is that I just did it and that I adapt to the circumstances. The rest is a high engagement to succeed, a willingness to suffer for the company. But I do not have a magic formula.

Perhaps I was just lucky four times in a row and I know it is going once again difficult in this mission so why not try it. Perhaps it could work.

This statement “why not try it” always allowed me to win a mission as present myself as a realistic executive – knowing the challenge is risky.

Field experience two: Layoffs versus keeping jobs

A lot of things depend on communication. Due to the financial situation of the company, everybody in the company knew there were going to be layoffs. I created some confidence and people started to ask me the question on how many people had to leave the company.

They opened their eyes when I explained them I had never thought on that question as my main concern was to create growth, new product lines so we could hire people. We probably will have some difficult times as a lot of things need to be done, but that’s the mission we all have. So I was communicating on renewal and not on layoffs so when I did execute some layoffs, people knew it was for long-term growth. There was a vision, a future so even when layoffs are difficult, it was executed with a shared understanding making things a lot easier.

Field experience three: Just delivering a key project

I had detected a lack of communication between our company and its B2B network and this lack of communication was costing us much money as our whole B2B network was unaware of our latest promotions, new inventory items...

One of the board members of the group decided to call for tenders to propose a solution (the group was paying the bid so I agreed with this initiative) and we received 2 price quotes some weeks later. Of course, as I was working in a cash-less company, I could never pay for it but the board was forcing

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen’s Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

me to accept it. Burning inside but extremely calm outside, I left the meeting telling them I was going to think about it and get back to them in one week time. The board asked me to promise to sign the order in one-week time. I refused telling them I am not promising anything and they can judge me on my acts as I knew we could get a better deal. No idea what that could be so I needed some time to deliver something.

Driving back to the office, I got stuck in a huge traffic jam so I stopped on the parking lot of a gas station, opened my laptop and reworked the whole problem. By focusing on the essential items and a lot of "thinking out of the box", I designed a simple html page containing a script to update the information.

In less than 2 hours (and still waiting for the traffic jam to disappear), I designed a solution rather close to what we wanted. I presented it that evening to the teams that tuned it and we got online 48 hours later. With almost no investment and almost no operational costs, we created our push portal. It was not big fancy thing as it asked us about 20 minutes time each week to update some data and the clicking on a "push B2B information" button to get the information distributed.

I knew this push portal would give us a competitive advantage for perhaps 2 months, as competition would do the same. At my big surprise, our main competitors went for the expensive one and it took them 10 months to go online – giving us a nice competitive advantage and increased revenues estimated to 4% of our annual revenues. And that's nice for a product that was designed on the parking lot of a gas station.

Lesson:

Personal thoughts: If things slow down or go wrong, don't wait for others to change it but do it yourself. Be creative and think on how you can do things differently.

If you are trying something with your right hand that doesn't work, try it with your left hand. Perhaps you need to do it with your feet...

You need to think "out of the box". Try to think on all ways to find a solution and if you can't find it, change the box so you can start thinking out of that new box.

Always think about the positive outcomes you need to create. And keep things simple.

If you don't do it, your closes competitor will do it and it will make your turnaround mission even more difficult.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

10. Go for speed, never for perfection

In each turnaround situation, you have to go extremely fast to save the company. You should only implement things that improve quickly the company situation so any improvement is worthwhile doing – even if it contains several weak points.

You can decide to “Go for it” like bringing a new product to market – even when you know you could deliver a better product if you waited an extra month. But time is against you and you need to create a dynamic environment to keep your customers.

Like I always say: Product improvement is a continuous effort so if we would like to bring a perfect item onto the marketplace, the market should still be waiting an extra 5 years. And nobody can wait so long.

I agree partly with the famous saying “It's always the fast that eat the slow”. It is true but you should never forget you have to finish. A wild cat can run fast – but it has to catch the animal otherwise it won't have anything to eat. So take care not to run out of cash, to invest too much in going fast... the only thing that matters is selling a lot of products and services with a good margin so you can have cash to continue.

Field experience one: New software package

In one of my missions, we were selling an old software package and customers started to leave us as they did not longer believe in the future of the company. It was not a problem of the software package itself but with the way they perceived the company.

So I decided to revamp the solution and even when it contained more than 200 bugs, the customers were surprised to see we brought it to market and that the solution was running. A little young as it contained many bugs but very promising. The 60% of customers that were still with us decided to stay with us and use the old software package a while before jumping to the new solution, expected to be

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

around 6 months time. It is clear that the introduction of the bug-full product has kept the company up and the solution, once debugged created renewal and growth for the company.

Field experience two: Corporate Intranet

I learned a lot from my first intranet projects that all failed as everyone was looking for perfection and there was always something new to add, it should reflect perfectly the company spirit... with the result it took months to publish something simple.

In my last mission, there was no intranet so I decided to open it myself. I asked to turn a very old desktop into a web server and two weeks later; I opened it with 6 simple pages. There was no particular design just information people liked to have.

I added every week around 5 extra pages like the planning of all our projects, the list of contracts we signed and so on.

The intranet was never perfect and never had a consistent design but it was heavily used by all employees and it created above all, a perfect shared understanding of where the company was going and the fact the executives shared information amongst all employees.

Field experience three: Landscape Project rescue

This project was quit different for us as we needed to prove that a certain landscaping project was overestimated. The estimated project, proposed by a government agency, would cost 10 million Euros to the surrounding communities. As an independent office, we only had 48 hours to do it and we would be paid on our results (a very small percentage of the savings).

We worked with 3 people on it – without any sleeping and delivered a landscaping design costing the community 4 million Euros. We presented it with a 3D simulation video to show how things would be when driving a car, a bus, a double deck bus... so everyone was convinced after the meeting of the quality of our report and that the project would cost 4 and not 10 million Euros.

Instead of reworking their proposal, the government agency focused on all the weak points of our proposal. Of course, there were a lot of extremely minor details (like typing mistakes) as we only had 48 hours to deliver our report. The project was executed with a cost of 4,2 million Euros ... the budget exceeding was to pay a lot of experts to confirm to the surrounding communities that our project contained some weak points. I still think we were right... at least on the budget estimation.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

Personal thoughts: Life is not perfect so do not try to strive for perfect files or perfect projects. The one that acts and fights for the company will win the battle.

The only thing you need to manage perfectly is communication.

11. Behaving like a small giant

Small companies have huge competitive advantages. They are uncluttered, simple, and informal. They thrive on passion and no bureaucracy. Small companies grow on good ideas - regardless of their source. They need everyone, involve everyone, and reward or remove people based on their contribution to winning. Small companies dream big dreams and set the bar high - increments and fractions don't interest them

Major companies have huge competitive advantages as they have unimaginable resources and mostly unused. Combing the best of both worlds can make you win.

Field experience one: Two teams – one project

I had a weak performing ERP solution that I needed to rework completely so I could install it in 2 environments (with 2 different clients). To manage this project, I took 2 different teams. The first one was a small start-up company while the second one was from a major IT contractor. Both worked with a lot of professionalism on their individual projects. The start-up team came up with an innovative solution, something never used or tested elsewhere, with an interesting low initial investment but risky and with almost no monitoring. The consultancy office came with a big designed solution, high initial investments but properly designed and with nice monitoring tools. The price difference between both solutions ranged from 1 to 3.

I organized a meeting with both teams in the same room (which was a big surprise for both of them) and I presented both solutions. With eyes wide open, they discovered both a different way of thinking. In the second part of the meeting, I proposed a join-venture solution. A mixture between both solutions keeping the innovative aspects (and low budget) with a properly designed engine and monitoring.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Both parties agreed to exchange experiences but teamwork was impossible as both entities refused the concept and the strange work methods of the other side. But giving advice to the other side was possible so we ended with a stable product, well monitored but based on a rather risky architecture.

Field experience two: The upside world

You can have a very interesting situation when working in a small start-up that is part of a major group.

The start-up wants to prove that they are as good as the group so they won't implement things if it is not documented, tested and approved. The group wants to have competitive advantage so implement tools as quickly as possible, so before the documentation is finished.

In fact, people are imitating the other part of the company so to move ahead with your mission, you have to implement a reverse communication channel where everybody acts as he thinks the other side should act. This is extremely complicated.

One day, things risk turning around so you should take care that it happens at the same time. If not, you are in a big mess as the internal power forces in the company are disturbed which is extremely dangerous.

Field experience three: Asian start-up environment

Like many companies, we have the difficulties to validate new technologies and study their possible impact for our business. Major groups can do it by asking one of their subsidiaries to implement this inside their company.

I had the opportunity with the opening of an Asian office to test and validate new technologies. This project allowed us to see how people would adapt to the new technological environment and take the necessary decisions for the head office. It was sure that some of the things needed to be adapted but it would also allow us to create a dynamic environment of innovation.

So I opened this Asian office based on Linux servers (our HQ was with Unix, VMS and Microsoft). The people were using Internet mail systems (against corporate email systems) and a shared Internet Agenda. Everyone had easy tools to create their own web pages (in the HQ, you needed to see the

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

webmaster team to publish a page). We were not using Microsoft Office but Open Office and we also implemented special search engines to find quickly information (we also gave training on how people should best use search engines on the Internet and which engine was the best to find a specific information...). We also had an internal database containing the best web sites for each topic and everyone in the company could complete the list.

Everybody also had instant messaging pre-configured and we created several project rooms to work faster on our products. We have also taken a subscription for all people to consult the 3 biggest libraries in the country so everyone could not only find the title of a book but also read the content of many articles and work faster on his/her research projects.

We also implemented videoconferencing through the Internet.

Conclusion: it was an extremely interesting project and a lot of the technological innovations were deployed throughout the group.

There were indeed some items that did not work (like the videoconferencing) as the quality of the technology at that time was not sufficient or lacking some reliability. So these new items got deployed 2 or 3 years later.

Personal thoughts: it is difficult to find the right mixture between innovation and stability, between fast growth and reliability. My mission as turnaround executive is to create a stable environment – by implementing drastic change. You have to drive slow as otherwise the car could break, but at the same time, you have to drive very fast speed to be able to stay in business.

I am told I need to build on the key assets of the company but at the same time; these key assets are the things that brought the company in a difficult situation so I need to implement new key assets for survival.

Innovation is something very interesting and motivating as long as it doesn't increase the risks of doing business.

12. Creating an enemy

When you're number one in your market place, you control your destiny. If the company is in difficulties, it is probably due to internal problems (unless the market place collapsed).

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide eBook

To motivate the troops, you can take your closest market competitor and declare him as your public enemy. Then you can try to beat him through market and product innovation.

The thing I prefer is to focus on a close enemy, someone we can grab in the next 6 months if we do a great job. For this, we need to beat our competitor on details and let the whole staff know when we won a small battle as each step will bring us closer to victory.

The problem is a little bit more complicated if you have to compete against a historical market leader. In this case, you have to win on details and use each sign of his weakness to create an advantage that motivates the troops.

In all cases, you have to prove at each interaction with a customer, a client, a prospect... that you are more professional than all others and delivering better services.

Field experience one: the market-breaker

This is extremely difficult as a new market entry can modify the whole market place. I have seen this at several occasions and each time, it asked us to rethink the way we were doing business.

I once worked in a software service environment where we installed the desktops, our software and delivered the support services. We had competition but as we asked the right price for our services, this was never a problem. The problem arrived when someone arrived on the market and cut prices as he gave the desktop for free (so no initial investment required for our clients). I hesitated a little bit to think on our strategy and we decided not to follow this price battle but instead, offer to our clients a 24 hour delay desktop repair service. We improved our customer services allowing us to keep our customers and win new interesting contracts.

In another case, we were delivering professional services as a monthly fee on the Internet, when suddenly a new company arrived and proposed our services for free in exchange of opening some advertisements windows on the screen. We had 3 difficult days as a lot of our customers resigned... but the new company could not deliver and they slowed down many web servers of their customers. One week after their market attack and all their technical problems, all our customers were back on our platform with one major advantage, our clients now knew the value of our service delivery.

Field experience two: the invisible enemy *Every company likes to think they are unique – and when you are unique, you can't have an enemy doing the same as you do. So I found myself inside this*

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

mission where we needed to innovate but where the people in the company had learned they were the best in their field.

So I decided to create a virtual enemy on a non-strategic issue - the size of our desktop team.

While we had 1 IT guy for each 60 users, all our market-alike competitors had 1 IT person for each 180 to 200 users. I did not forget to mention to the team that the board would receive one day these numbers so we needed to be proactive to tell them we are doing a good business. So I asked the team to propose me a roadmap and I set as a 6 month target to get to 1 IT guy for each 90 users (meaning 33% less IT guys for desktop support) and to transfer the people to more effective support functions like user training and project assistance (like helping people in creating web pages).

The team came up with a great plan as they found it a brilliant idea as it could get them closer to the users and have less technical problems to handle.

The invisible enemy worked beyond expectations as the team did not only innovate their own desktop installations but also remodelled their helpdesk services and updated all training material.

Field experience three: the number enemy

In one of my missions, I had to restructure a call centre managing a huge number of different types of calls. Customer satisfaction surveys were always bad and employees did not believe a customer could ever love their service. So I had to invent an enemy to compete against... and I decided to fight against the numbers.

I worked on a 2 way reporting. The first one was to focus on the worst service issues and at the same time, create a set of 3 action plans on things that could be improved fast.

The action plans were the quick wins that allowed me to communicate fast on our winning strategy while the bad issue was the thing we tried to improve but that would take a longer time to succeed.

The second plan was based on one SLA number (a combination of several key values of the call centre) And there I started to cheat. The first month, I connected to the database and modified some of the numbers of the reporting system so our reporting lost a 0.4 note on a scale of 10. The next month, we had the same performance level but I only lowered the data in our SQL database of a 0.2 level. Result, our service level numbers increased 0.2 points so people started discussing that perhaps the different action plans were indeed delivering major improvements. The next month, as the staff was getting

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

motivated and without modifying the numbers, we improved again 0.2 points (making 0.4 with my correction), which really boosted the whole staff. I then got of this mission but I continued to advice the team and get news from them as they were writing shortcuts to avoid problems, they were updating their manuals so they could reply faster to our customers...and so on. Things were moving as they were fighting against the numbers. And at each victory, they celebrated it with a big drink in the restaurant.

I got back on site after 10 months as the supervisor felt he was loosing control as he couldn't constantly improve the numbers and he thought the company should refocus on new values. I agreed with him so I decided to change the framework and implement new numbers based on a customer satisfaction survey realised each 2 months. We still calculated the other numbers but we shifted the focus of their fight to new numbers. As a base line, I showed them the fake results of a survey I told them I did when I arrived 18 months ago (which was not true but nobody was still in place so nobody could reject my point). The first survey numbers announced that things had changed significantly in the past year so people were motivated to continue. To push them, I proposed to give every staff member a two month salary bonus if they could reach the "extremely good" note which, at my surprise, they realised in less than 4 months time.

Of course, at that time, I was already far away as you don't need turnaround executives for excellent performing call centres.

Personal thoughts: Creating an enemy is an easy solution but you have to take care. The objective is not to beat the enemy by creating an "external war" but to beat him through internal transformation to deliver better client services than he can do.

I always speak with a lot of respect of my competitors' skills, forces, and products as they force us to be good and to improve constantly internal processes to deliver better services and products.

Take care that nobody in the company speaks negatively about your competitors as the market will know you negative message and react also negatively to it, especially in a B2B network.

A positive attitude towards the market always creates a positive return.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

13. While God created Sundays, France created the 35 hourweek

France is gone completely crazy with the implementation of a workweek of 35 hours. Nobody really understood it as they do not longer see it as working 35 hours but as being in the company for 35 hours. The most important thing they do in the day is looking their watch to take care not to exceed their working time with one single minute. Shame on the one that works a minute too much. This creates an atmosphere of a workforce that thinks the 35 hours means they only need to work 35 hours a month (not to say 35 hours a year).

But there are still people that want to work... but the number is going down quickly as the government and the unions only takes care for those that do the minimum amount of work – or for the workless.

The turnaround executive has to fill in all the gaps... so he has the impression to work 35 hours a day.

Field experience one: finishing work

You can really have a problem if people think they are paid for the hours they work – as promoted through the 35 hours workweek – so they refuse to work a minute extra to finish a job. In one of my missions, we needed to install desktops throughout the country and I subcontracted this activity. While this was a smooth operation, many of the last installation of the day caused problems as the technician could not finish his job so he had to return the next day. After a first analysis, we found out that in 80% of the cases, we only missed 5 minutes to finish the job. So for 5 minutes, the technician had to come back to that site, losing around 2 hours for a job that could be done easily.

I discussed the issue with the subcontractor but the technicians got instantly the unions involved requesting that those 5 minutes should be paid as a full hour salary bonus. Of course I refused this as this meant automatically that all technicians would spend 5 minutes extra a day on the different sites to get an extra bonus.

Soon after and as there was no discussion possible, I ended the contract and swapped to a smaller subcontractor ready to be flexible on the workinghours executed during a single day (but still respecting the 35 hours a week).

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience two: the company that doesn't work anymore

In a second mission, I was working in an environment where the 35 workweek was executed in a 4 days a week schedule. The problem with this is that the company did not longer work as there was always someone missing to do the job. I have several examples of things that got delayed by days just as key people were missing.

On a Monday, I went to see our CFO as I needed to sign a contract. The problem was that he did not know where the contract was and as his assistant had her weekly day off, I had to come back on Tuesday. When I arrived that day, the assistant was present but... the CFO had at his turn, his day off so he could not validate the amount. Thinking that Wednesday should be the great day... I got indeed his signature but then needed validation from legal services that ... was off that day. So at last, I got all signatures on Thursday so I could see our operations manager to implement it as this online service needed to be started 48 hours after contract signature. Of course, Thursday was his day off and as we did not open any new service on Friday, we could open the service the next Monday.

Next Monday... we did not start the service as we needed our network manager to make a change on the network and indeed, it was his day off.

It is horrible working in these conditions.

I had the same experiences when deploying a major ERP package. There was always someone missing. The installation of the file server took one week instead of one day as each day of the week, someone was missing. The network administrator was out on Monday, the server guy had his day of on Tuesday while the Oracle guy had his Wednesday. The IT manager that needed to validate the installation was off on Thursday. The desktop manager that needed to install and test the client application was off on Friday. And this was just for the first week. The second week was dedicated to reset the application so we could deploy it afterwards... but also there, we found a lot of people missing each day.

I regularly wonder if things are made to function in France.

Field experience three: increasing workload

The implementation of the 35-hour workweek created also a very bad social climate.

I was operating an IT support service and as our company was losing money, I could not hire extra people to do the job. Result, the only thing I could do is increasing the workload for everyone.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

The number of calls to be treated by each operator was increased by 10% so even the most performing people lost their “monthly high-performance bonus”. Our performance-tracking tool got upgraded to treat more work with the same people. We also started using more halftime employees to be more flexible.

The desktop people had to handle more interventions and install more desktops in a day to get things done.

While we only had global performance numbers of each service, we now went into detail and tracked each individual to see where we could save money and where we could save time. While we used to train person with the lowest performance to increase their efficiency, we now dedicated them to lower responsibilities or fired them. Yes, I used to be generous before the implementation of the 35 hours with training courses (a week a year for each employee) but I now only respect the legal minimum.

I also implemented Internet Monitoring software so we limited the access to the Internet to a list of sites I personally approved. So I avoided that people were spending 15% of their time surfing on the web to read some personal mail, to read the news, the weather conditions or even use instant messaging. The 35 hours workweek created a lot more stress, frustration and a lot more people monitoring to take a maximum advantage of their time in the office.

At the same time, it created much longer working hours for all executives that now have to manage more people than before.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

Chapter 2: Hidden work methods

14. One and One makes...twenty

In all my missions, I arrived in a company that was in a deep crisis and operating without adequate reporting mechanisms. The existing board was flying an airplane without any data neither fly book. They did not know where they were going to... just happy to stay in the air and avoid crashing.

Every company needs direction – so you also need to set direction.

Check quickly all information and build your own set of management data as data from the previous management team will probably be wrong or inaccurate (otherwise the company should not be in a crisis situation).

Field experience one: Customer retention and upsale numbers

The management team was using 2 numbers for their financial forecasting in a subscription-based service. A customer retention of 90% and an upsale to existing customers at contract renewal of 4%.

When I analysed the numbers of the past 9 months, I discovered that we had customer retention of only 81% and an upsale of existing contracts of 24%.

Result: I discovered an $81+24=105\%$ revenue increase while they were working with a $90+4=94\%$ revenue increase. This 11% revenue difference is too important to neglect in your forecasting.

I found the 81% customer retention to low so I decided to implement a customer retention plan to bring it up to 90%. In less than 2 months time, my revenue growth to my existing customer base became $90\% + 24\% = 114\%$ or a difference of more than 20% compared with the original financial forecasts of 94%.

With these right numbers adding to revenue from new sales, I could bring the company to a high growth level (+73% for that year).

PS: the first reaction will be that you are like many executives, cheating with the numbers. But this is not cheating but just getting the numbers right to control properly the company.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience two: Service Level Agreement

I was working in an environment where customers were completely unsatisfied of the services our e-business platform delivered. To solve this issue, the previous management team had implemented a set of “technical SLA numbers” like uptime, system availability, hours of connections... to measure the performance of the system but the user complaints continued.

I created a user group to discuss the issue but this was not a success as we continued discussing on these indicators. After 3 months, I decided to take a radical change and presented 2 numbers:

- *A first one as the YES percentage to the question “where you satisfied this month on our service delivery”*
- *A second one – measured by the users themselves this time – our system availability. Roughly said, we put an HP Openview monitor in their office so they could have a view on our availability and it was their responsibility to give the numbers each month.*

Result: the discussion with the user group changed instantly from a technical discussion on numbers to a discussion around service levels. We were using user group indicators and not longer IT generated indicators to measure user satisfaction.

Field experience three: Relationship between Marketing Campaigns and Sales Activity

In one of my missions, I had to turn around an extreme weak performing marketing campaign team as the promotions did not result in sales. After a profound analysis of campaigns and the sales numbers, I discovered that there was a time gap of 2 months between a specific product campaign and the time people purchased that specific product.

I still don't know the exact reason for this time gap but by modifying the schedule of our marketing campaigns and measuring it on a 3 month basis, we suddenly received numbers suitable for a normal performing marketing team – and this without modifying our campaigns neither our marketing budgets.

(PS: sometimes a turnaround executive doesn't need to act – just to explain what happens to bring a difficult situation under control).

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

Personal thoughts: In the world of numbers, it is the one that creates the numbers that controls the world. Even if they are temporarily inaccurate, I can only recommend putting in place quickly a scorecard to rule all corporate waves. And this is one of my forces as I control many numbers – from accounting to supply chain, from turning sales previews into cash flow, from IT capacity planning to HR numbers.

15. Counting the cups of coffee (this one hurts!)

As Turnaround executive, you will arrive in a difficult environment and you have to control all the people inside the company. There will be people you need to motivate while you need to kick out others.

There are small details that can help you a lot in your daily activity.

Field experience one: Counting the cups of coffee

You can detect a lot on each individual by tracking his consumption of coffee or cigarettes in time. Yes, I know exactly how many cups of coffee each person drinks and how many times he/she goes out to light a cigarette. If the person starts drinking more cups of coffee, suddenly starts smoking or lightens every day an extra cigarette, it means he/she is getting stressed. If I want to keep that staff member, I have to act quickly and secure him so he/she will lower his/her consumption and become more performing.

But if I want that person to leave the company, I have the perfect indicator that my actions are getting results and I can start pushing even harder to make him/her leave. It is still the most efficient way to lower headcount without paying layoff fees.

Of course, never tell people you are counting or they'll hide their attitude.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience two: Monitoring behaviour

An easy element to measure is to detect changes in attitude when people arrive in the morning, the time spend during dinnertime and when they leave in the evening. The most important thing is to focus on the change in behaviour pattern as this indicates stability or un-stability.

This is only the visible part but you can also look to the hidden side. You can also focus on the number of personal calls a person gives a day or the time they spend surfing on the Internet. Even if I don't like to track what people are doing, I implemented with a lot of precaution some technical monitoring tools like the number of calls a person makes. With precaution as you need to respect the law – even if the law is sometimes unclear. The best solution I think is to handle it directly with the person. If I find someone having a personal call, I joke by interrupting him/her and saying seen the time spend on the phone, he/she has to be on a big deal so I just propose to help to get the deal signed. Embarrassed, the person hangs up quickly and avoids giving personal calls. It always worked – at least when I am in the office building.

Field experience three: Am I getting paranoiac or what?

By monitoring your employees, you can also detect some weird issues that can help you to detect other problems or even hidden issues.

I had an accounting manager that was working hard so I never got any suspicion. One day, she told me she had to leave to see in the afternoon to see the dentist because of a lost filling. I found it extremely weird when she took at noon a plate with rice – something you never do with a lost filling. In the early afternoon, she left to see the dentist with 2 binders under her arm. Without being paranoiac, I knew there was something wrong as you don't take binders to a dentist. So I started investigating and found out that during her work hours, she was doing on her own initiative, the accounting of several other companies. Of course, she left the company some weeks later, the time to find a new manager.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Personal thoughts: Several management books mention the issue of looking at human behaviour details – like counting the number of cups of coffee – but besides myself, I never found someone doing it. It is an important element in people management as you can detect when someone is going through a bad time – and act accordingly. It helped me a lot to re-motivate several team members – or just get them to speak about their troubles.

16. Eliminating Weak Performers

As a new executive, you have huge influence on employee motivation. With the right set of techniques, you can affect your employees' behaviours right now. "You can reawaken and revive the spirit in the organization. Not only that, you can inspire all those around you by creating an environment in which employees will tap their own motivational energy and perform their best work. As you have to go fast, you have to identify the people that are still motivated and those that can be motivated quickly. If you understand what each of these employees motivate, you have at your command the most powerful tool for dealing with them and to get each of them achieve extraordinary results.

In many cases, you have people that are tired through the difficult situation of the company. Not motivated at all, they can block smooth daily operations. You have to detect why they are in that situation and then take the appropriate decision to motivate them. Perhaps they are just in the wrong position so a transfer to a new job can motivate them instantly. For others, it is more complicated and as you are in a turnaround situation requiring layoffs, you have to get rid quickly of these weak performing people.

But be careful as many weak performers especially in supervisor or management positions can have a strong hidden network and they will not hesitate to mobilize their network against you.

Field experience one: Eliminating the Sales Manager

I was confronted with a sales manager that was personally performing normaly on sales, but was extremely weak in directing his teams or to open new markets. He also had strong relationships with

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

the shareholders which made it difficult for me to fire him. Or he adapted himself to empower his team and open new markets, or I had to get make him move out of the company.

My 2 step action plan was to implement weekly and monthly sales reporting (a thing he hate) and then attack his expense notes (that's an easy one as this always works with sales people).

By implementing corporate rules for all expense notes, I reduced heavily his way of living and he could not longer go to luxury hotels and restaurants.

In less than 2 months, the sales manager resigned and I temporarily replaced him realizing in the next months the same sales numbers (and of course – respecting largely my own defined expense policy) and introduced our products into new markets.

Field experience two: Call Centre Manager

When I was called in to restructure a call centre, I noticed instantly the extremely weak performance of the call centre manager. The two supervisors were running the business and were tired of the situation. As I needed to reduce the headcount, I decided to fire the manager and to promote on of the supervisors.

The manager then mobilized his network to avoid his layoff and I had a lot of people inside the company that went to see me and even customers that called me to tell me they were upset and that they are questioning to stay with us. I answered openly that the latest customer satisfaction survey showed a low satisfaction index so I have heard their complaints and created an action plan for them so to get a lot of satisfied customers in a short delay. This can require unpopular decisions like firing a manager. I also told every client that I would get back to them next month to indicate the latest customer satisfaction numbers. The results indicated a major improvement in our service level so it was no problem for me to call everyone back and create a positive relationship with the customers.

Of course, when I took the decision, I did not think on these extra communication efforts so I had to spend many extra hours in the office to manage this situation but it was worth it.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience three: Promote your enemy

I was operating a company under difficult circumstances with some bad supervisors. At the end of the year and the annual salary review, I didn't want to give any raise as the financial situation of the company did not allow it.

But a lot of forces were against me so I decided that each supervisor could decide of the salary increase for each of his team members. Of course, money was not available so I decided to split my quarterly bonus between the different teams.

And what I expected happened. All supervisors decided to increase their own salary without distributing it to their teams. At the same time, they communicated there was no raise this year due to the financial difficulties.

Of course, when every employee knew what happened (oops ...like they say, I think I left again a paper on the copy machine), they decided not to work any longer with the traitors and they forced the supervisors to leave. As these supervisors quitted, I was not forced to pay any layoff fees and I could use that money as a salary increase for everyone.

Personal thoughts: Firing people is something I don't like at all but I am obliged to do it to keep the company going. I personally prefer to do it the hidden way by taking off the last part of motivation of certain people so they will leave on their own or become useless in the team so firing is not longer cause an organizational problem.

17. Do not push dirt – Clean it!

A turnaround executive has to transform an existing company into a new one and take quickly the necessary decisions. It is important to understand that in many cases, there is a lot of dirt to clean so you need to start cleaning at your arrival. Imagine a new internal or customer problem arrives each hour. In the end of the day, you will have 10 extra issues to solve if you did not do anything about it.

Problems are not like wine that gets better with age – they get worse if not treated quickly so you should act fast. If possible directly at the source as this avoids similar problems to return.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Also take care not to create with your quick decisions new problems as they will be twice as difficult to solve because everybody will remind you that you are the one that created the crisis situation. It will be bad for your image and cause problems on your leadership skills.

Field experience one: Virus issues

The IT department was known as a weak performing team and things had to change. After my first analysis, I was surprised to find out that half of the interventions were linked with the installation of anti-virus software or repairing of desktops infected by a virus.

To solve this situation, the existing team called in some extra resources to handle it which was a good thing in everybody's opinion as it increased the staff numbers for the IT department – so the department got bigger and received extra budgets. In the end, half of the support team was working on virus issues – and glad to do that as they found it interesting as they created happy customers.

So I had to change this reasoning and solve the issue at the source so I had a first meeting with all managers and supervisors. I decided to play a little theatre and asked the desktop manager to stand in front of me. I told him I was a bad virus and tapped him in the face. He was surprised and asked me... what are you doing? I told him I was a bad virus and moved my arm again but now, the desktop manager raised his arm so I could not touch him.

Then I made the note to all of them ... look what happened. He is defending himself against viruses. He does not want to have the pain. And this is how you all should act – by defending yourself so it will not hurt you. As the desktop manager had lowered his arm, I moved again my arm and tapped him into his face mentioning...and you should always remember that protecting yourself is a continuous effort.

We then started discussing on how to take an aggressive defence strategy and in less than 2 months, the number of virus incidents was cut by more than 10 making it a minor corporate issue. This also allowed me to reduce the number of resources and save a lot of money (which I needed for the financial part of my turnaround).

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience two: Cash

In one of my missions, I had a lot of technical problems to solve. I checked the cash issue at my arrival and there was, at first view, no problem. I knew I had to do extra verifications but our sales were doing very well so I focused completely on the solving of our organizational and technical issues. After 6 months, when these issues were under control, I found myself with cash problems in the company. Even when we invoiced a lot, many clients did not pay their bills. Result, the company was still in danger – not on technical service delivery but on financial side.

I needed 3 months to restore the situation as a lot of clients refused to pay mentioning our invoices were too old to be paid.

Field experience three: Cost cutting from day one

In case of financial problems, a turnaround executive has to start cutting costs from day one and remember that ALL contracts can be negotiated, even with people that have a monopoly.

The first thing I do is to ask people to create a list of all the contracts we have with the contract amount and the day I can resign.

Once I receive some first elements (I need to go down at least 3 to 4 times to get a first draft), I start contacting my suppliers to renegotiate the amount of the contracts.

If I can end the contract, I will do it. If not and depending on the service or the supplies, I demand a contract modification. In case the service delivery is bad, I list all problems so I can see my supplier to renegotiate the contract (or even finish it).

I once made the mistake not to resign an important data network contract. I could have ended the contract but it was only my first week in the company and I had a lot of other files to treat. Result, we continued for a year with the same bad contract.

I then decided to create a legal file against them as we had a lot of technical problems. When I met the company 3 months later, I had everything in my hands to end the contract but the company replied with a financial alternative that was very interesting for the company.

So the contract got transformed into a new contract giving me important cost reductions. I did the same thing with our mail orders, electricity...

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

18. Finding the right trigger

In an ordinary company, an executive just has to run the company and empower the existing forces. There are a lot of possibilities and the margins of error are large. Roughly said, this kind of executive has a full machine gun standing right in front of a grizzly and he only has to touch the trigger to be successful.

In a company having major difficulties, the turnaround executive does not have those margins. He only has one bullet and he has to hit the grizzly between the eyes. Very risky especially if the grizzly is standing in front of him with his eyes turned to the sky.

The turnaround executive has to understand perfectly ALL the internal mechanisms of a company, its people and what makes each of them move ahead. So these are the questions I ask to myself each time:

- *Which items do I need to touch to influence Employee Satisfaction?*
- *Which items do I need to touch to influence Customer Satisfaction?*
- *Where do I have to play to turn Employee Satisfaction into Customer Satisfaction?*
- *Where do I have to play to turn Customer Satisfaction into Shareholder Satisfaction?*
- *Which items do I need to touch to influence the Service Delivery Infrastructure?*
- *Which items do I have to touch to reduce the psychological impact of a layoff plan?*
- *What items will be improved if I invest in my service infrastructure?*
- *Which items do I need to touch to increase sales? Do I launch new promotion campaigns, Customer Satisfaction, Motivate employees, Salary increase...*
- *What items do I need to touch to disable all people that are against my action plans – even worse, all people that are against the company? If your company has a bad name in the written press, how change this message?*

These are just some of the many questions that need to be answered in a very short delay. A lot of normal executives have “off-the-shelf” answers but they do not realise that in turnaround situations, everything is tightly linked together and extremely fragile. They go see the grizzly with only one bullet

in their gun and they just shoot it if nothing could happen. They really don't know what it is to be in front of a grizzly.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience one: Salary Request solved by investments

It is a typical case of a turnaround mission so after passing through an extremely difficult period, the company was going better and returned making some minor benefits (to pay some of our debts). Once the employees noticed this, they requested that this success was shared between all employees (meaning a salary increase for everyone) and send their request directly to the shareholders (knowing I would be against). Their action was well planned as I was of the office for 2 days so they got a verbal approval from the shareholders before I could interact.

At my return, I got aware of the situation and got back to the shareholders with a different story. In the whole turnaround situation, I had given a lot of result oriented bonuses and 95% of all employees had seen a revenue increase between 7 and 10% so things had been done and if they were actually unsatisfied, it was not for salary reasons but for a lack of investments in the Service Delivery infrastructure. A salary increase would not solve their problem and they would get back to the board each 6 months for a new salary increase. Result, I did not agree with the fact an average salary increase of 10% (that would bring the company in a very difficult financial situation) but announced a series of investments oriented in delivering better tools for all employees and also some modification in the office layout.

Once announced, everyone started working hard as they knew the shareholders were investing heavily in the company to become market leader.

Field experience two: Impossible new service delivery

An existing service delivery to the headquarters needed a complete revision since several months but all initiatives failed as internal forces blocked all proposals. The people against it (I called them the terrorists) had an important impact on the overall feeling towards the group and especially against the list of service requirements made by the main shareholder.

In a first step, I analysed the demand and the reasons why this service needed to be modified and found it technically easy to implement. So the problem was located in the memory of the people and the history of relations between the company and the group. These feelings of course well used by the “terrorists”.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

So I took the shape of a terrorist saying the group initiative was unimportant and we should propose to our customers a new service based on our own productivity tools and our work methods. Soon, people found out this project helped indeed our customers, but it also increased our own productivity. It also increased their own skill level and it became a discussion issue inside the group. After 4 months, the team wanted me to push this project to all users in the head office. But for this, they needed to adapt our product to the requirements of the HQ, which was not longer, a problem and they even imagined a new way to deliver it. Result, we started 3 weeks later the deployment of this “impossible” project.

The problem in this project was to find the right trigger in an extremely complex situation. The fact things started moving, even in a different direction, allowed us to embrace the project and deliver it to our HQ (representing 65% of our product revenue).

Field experience three: Satisfying everybody

For one of my major software projects, a very politically loaded one, I created 5 different presentations – one for each board member on the issues that he wanted to see in the project. The finance guy got assured of the project-control issues and the financial results, the executive on the strategic aspects and how he could present it to his peers, the operations director on all the technical implementation issues and how we would deploy it and train his staff.

I did a lot of informal discussions. So I spoke with the Spanish executive on the things I was going to present (important for him to be aware of it before the others) while I discussed with the German executive all the technical details I checked before creating my report. With the US executive, I discussed the fact that everybody seemed to agree with my proposal and listed some of the possible comments that people could give on my project so she could take position during the meeting to facilitate the validation. It all sounds like a huge cultural cliché but it works.

Even when all individual presentations were lacking data and I only discussed partial items with the executives... all members got the answers on their questions so they all approved the project and I got one of the easiest kick-off meetings in my life.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Personal thoughts: To help myself detecting and selecting the right trigger to activate, I created a big drawing (D size or A1 size) containing all the links impacting all the possible elements and I scotched it on my bedroom wall. I look at least once a week to this sheet with more than 120 elements and 120 triggers to make the right business decisions.

I think it is dangerous to share it in this book as a wrong use can really harm a company. Perhaps I'll write one day another book to explain how my triggers work.

19. Igniting my own business models

A lot of consultants create innovating business models but do not know how to implement them neither how to restructure a company to make things happen. And the few that can do it, they do necessarily master the delays or the results of it. The reason is simple as in turnaround situations, it is the details that count, not the master plan.

Field experience one: corporate wide support services

In one of my missions, the company was receiving a huge amount of clients on-site so it was important for us to increase the satisfaction of these visits. My proposition to make all internal services work together did not work out. Everyone was waiting to see the other move first so nothing happened.

So I decided to ignite it myself. I stayed extremely late in the office and then walked around in all buildings and wrote down all problems. It could be a flickering neon lighting, a problem with the carpet next to the coffee machine or a pending wall plug. I wrote this down on 2/3 different papers (with different writing styles to indicate several people wrote the notes) and I put it under the door of facility management. For all IT issues, I also wrote some notes in different handwritings and gave them personally to the desktop manager saying the cleaning staff gave it to me this morning. After 3 days, people got aware that quality of our infrastructure was a corporate issue and everyone started to play the game. Each time someone noticed a problem, he escalated it quickly to the appropriate service for intervention. The building quality and customer services improved radically.

Of course, nobody ever knew what I did to make these things working.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience two: product sales

In one of my missions, I had to launch a new software product on the market and it was extremely important for the company. But the employees in the company were reluctant so I decided to contact a major reseller and made a deal with him. He bought 300 boxes right away and my staff was happy with this result and they got motivated to sell it, to propose it to the different distribution channels and it was a discussion item at several client meetings.

Of course, nobody knew the deal I made. If my reseller could not sell these boxes in the next 3 months, I would take them back and give him an extra 3% discount on all of the other products he was distributing. The reseller sold all boxes without a problem so everyone won with my action.

Field experience three: Call Laurence

I had the case our customer support service was considered to be “to cold” or “un-human”. I implemented several internal changes but the satisfaction surveys stayed extremely low. To change this perception, I created a virtual person – called Laurence – which we put in front to all our customers.

We introduced this person with a nice newsletter, including a nice photograph of the wife of one of our managers, and mailed it all customers. In this letter, she presented herself and her vital mission to improve customer service. She also invited people to write her a fax or email each time the client had an issue and she would personally take care of the issue.

We received several replies (and congratulations) that allowed us to communicate more intense with our customers. They suddenly could put a face on our support services and making any change in the internal organization we got instantly good satisfaction survey results.

Of course, these good results motivated the whole team and created spontaneous other quality improvements in the next 6 months.

Personal thoughts: I have been cheating to make my own projects or change programs work but it was necessary to do. The most important thing is that I played it neatly (never against a service) with only positive outcomes for everyone.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

I know it was wrong as a well-defined project or business initiative does not need forcing so my initiatives were, at least by definition, incomplete to make it on their own.

Even now, I am still wondering on how to have done it differently to make it a clean – self supported business case. I still don't have the answer.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

Chapter 3: It's called Skill set

19. Opportunity licking

Knowing that your company is in bad shape, you have to find quickly extra revenue. This can be done with existing customers (did they pay all their bills – can we sell extra services to them ...) or by finding new revenues.

Detecting these new business opportunities can be extremely challenging but also very time frustrating as you do not have the resources to go as want (the company is in bad shape so you don't have the money to make things happen).

Field experience one: Cash through international expansion

I needed urgently money so I decided to licence our in-house developed eBusiness platform to another country and create a distribution contract with an Italian partner. This win-win relationship gave us an annual fee (and instant cash to pay my employees) and the Italian partner was extremely happy as he received a full eBusiness platform at a cheap price. The selling of some of our assets to a company in another country can be a real solution to get quickly a cash flow to enable corporate survival – or at least pay the bills to keep the company going for a short time. Of course, it also requires legal fees to blind the contract as you still need to protect your own core market – in my case, the partner could never launch an English or French version.

Field experience two: New distribution channels

In another case, I had a nice product but I needed to increase dramatically our production volume. I got in contact with a major retail network needing a new product to distribute and by playing a clever business game, I realised them to invest in our company and then to distribute our products throughout their shops with good margins.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Result: in less than 6 months time, we doubled our production and revenues while our production costs only increased by 15%. We were still losing money but at least, we were getting closer to corporate rescue.

Field experience three: Check and mate

I was obliged to answer to a major bid for a hard and software installation as we were expected to win it. The only problem was that we could not deliver and we should pay the high contractual penalties. Trying to loose the deal was not a good solution as the shareholders made it clear we needed to win this deal if we wanted further funding. So winning was necessary for the company survival but it should also bring the company in an extremely dangerous situation.

I took the decision to take a frontal attack strategy by destroying the bid content itself. I build a whole file mentioning why it was dangerous to implement the requested solution. What I proposed was to take over their existing infrastructure and to improve it with a new service contract. The manager responsible of the selection team finished the meeting asking if I was aware we lost the bid with this extremely weird proposal. I replied that sometimes the board selects a good-looking proposal, and sometimes the truth and I was confident in their decision.

I have to admit having a difficult week waiting for the final answer but I was glad to hear nobody won the bid and they offered my company a good service proposal.

Personal thoughts: I do not have personal feelings about this issue. It is just about doing business and the way business is done. I played the game in an honest and intelligent way just by using or strengths – or our weaknesses to win a new contract.

20. Being the corporate communication channel

In turnaround situations, you need to be the one that speaks. Of course, you have to listen a lot but it is your voice that should count.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Each moment of silence from your side is losing a battle. Not necessarily the war but at least a battle.

Field experience one: People listen to the one that whispers... not the one that shouts

The problem with turnaround situation is that you can have two situations. Or everyone is talking, distributing his ideas and solutions.... Result, too many ideas kill the brilliant idea. And what is even worse is that the loudest guy is saying the less interesting things while the whispering guy is giving the most useful information.

So my action plan was to stop the noise of the loudest guys so people could listen to the people who had serious ideas.

I changed my behaviour by making them feel that whatever they have to say is unimportant. I also stressed this feeling when other employees asked me what I thought of his/her proposition and I just mentioned their proposals didn't mean anything and gave them an example of what would go wrong if I did what they suggested.

Result, rather than being rebellious, they stopped trying because they felt their issues are not longer important and a next suggestion would only worsen their alter-ego image in the company.

The time of their silence was enough to make other people speak and build a real action plan.

Field experience two: Meeting the strikers

In one of my missions, and just after the announcing of a cost cutting plan (with no layoffs), I had a group of 100 people manifesting just in front of the building. Everybody could see they were angry so I decided to go out and speak to them.

I don't know where the executives and managers were at that time – probably hiding somewhere in the building. Everybody told me not to go out as they were going to lynch me. But when I asked everybody what they wanted, nobody knew so I had to go out to discover.

I had 2 or 3 difficult minutes to pass to calm down the crowd as they were shouting. A person in the crowd shouted he would call the prime minister to tell him what I was doing. I told him I would love to have the engagement of the prime minister for our company as this would open us the doors of some banks to get some extra loans. Another person shouted that his father was a general and that his army would soon arrive to take over control of the company. I said "great, and also ask them to come

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

with some power generators as we had some electrical problems in the plant that day – so they could smoothen our production line and assure normal operations.” Everybody started laughing with my remark and the group split and people started to leave the premises.

So I was now the only person standing in front of the building and I felt very strange. First of all as I still didn't know what they wanted (except sending the prime minister and the army) neither what they were going to do (going home or having some coordination to continue their actions in front of the building). When I entered the building, I also felt strange as I needed to explain to the staff that I had spoken with them... but I didn't learn anything about the things they wanted.

I was glad to see that some 15 minutes later, one by one all people entered the building and started working again – everybody extremely quiet behind his desk. It was the quietest afternoon in my life.

This event gave me the reputation of being someone that gave serious answers to their questions. I don't consider my answers as strategically brilliant but neither were their questions. I still wonder what they wanted but I hesitated to ask them afterwards.

The only lesson I learned was the easiness to meet them, listen to them even if they had nothing to say and to explain them I was thinking hard on the future of the company.

Field experience three: Newsletter spamming

Taking over a bad running IT service, I soon found out that all communication confirmed that IT was weak. While I was solving some of the IT problems, I decided to counter attack and become the communication channel.

Without asking any permission, neither discussing it with my staff, I started to write newsletters to explain the technical issues to all employees – and to show them how they could take better profit of IT. A kind of “newsletter for the dummies”.

I wrote a total of 14 newsletters in 4 months time (about one a week) which got distributed to all employees. The result was great as people discovered the small details that changed their way to manipulate their computer environment. And in the hallways, you started hearing the remark it should be nice if human resources could communicate like IT did.

The newsletter was the key communication element that changed user perception and I knew people were not longer speaking but were listening to us.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Personal thoughts: The most difficult thing in communication is that you need to reach everyone. There will be the ones that will read your newspapers and make your organisation more efficient – but they won't help you for the next communication as they are “information eaters”. There is the second group, the “opinion collectors”, that will never read your writings but that need to hear from others how great it is ... and they will communicate their vision to others. They are the “information distributors” between nothing (they did not read your document) and something (they invite people to read it). And there is the forth kind of people, the “information creators” that give you advice on things you should write... but they present issues that make no difference as they never collected information from the field (they are creators – not information eaters).

It is a very difficult question everyone should ask ... how distribute a message as there are people that only reads notes, the ones that only read emails, the one you need to talk to at the coffee machine... All different profiles you need to satisfy in a short time span ... but not at the same time to enable/disable the power player game.

So the most important thing of creating communication is to have the information and then make it run around through the information distributors.

21. Creating your own rumours

All companies have rumours and they are all extremely strong. You can write down official notes, be open for all kind of discussions... everything can be destroyed with the rumours created by the uncertain situation but also created by your enemies.

The thing you need to do is to create your own rumours.

Field experience one: The Pirate web site

I was working as turnaround IT Director in a major company with a very open environment. The problem was that we had an extremely bad reputation and nobody believed in our skills. The existing IT team needed to be replaced to get the right skill sets in house.

I created with 2 of my team members a web site to assist all users with their daily IT problems. Just a simple web site with easy navigation but lots of interesting information. I brought this website online

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide eBook

under the name “the pirate”. In the late evening, I put a small anonymous post-it on the desk of one of the executive assistants saying she should connect to this pirate web site as it had great information. The next day, the rumour worked as we had 50 different people connected – getting up after 3 days to 500 different people each day.

The pirate site was “great” as at least, someone cared about the users and it showed to everyone how IT services should be. It all stayed a hidden business with a lot of rumours of who could be that hero that understood the users. After 2 weeks, the CEO called me in his office and at my surprise, asked me to detect the owners of the Pirate web site as he wanted to discuss with them on implementing new service levels and create an action plan for our “Turnaround driven IT team” as their ideas were great. I hesitated some seconds and I had to tell the truth that we were the team behind this pirate server and that it was the best way to create communication around our IT transformation initiatives. He smiled saying that he discovered for the first time what it was to have a real turnaround team. Of course, he told it to his assistant and the next day, the whole company was aware of it that the turnaround team was great.

Field experience two: Money for the business transformation

During another mission, I had to organize a layoff and of course, this requires money and a lot of difficult negotiations with the teams, not to say the unions. As soon as I got the secret budget validated by the shareholders, I have sent the main shareholder a fax with the schedule of its implementation. I took of course care of using a neutral fax cover sheet and I attached a newly created note indicating I accepted their “business transformation investment” even if this required some necessary cuttings. I’ve never send this document but just left it in the middle of my desk. Even when I close my office every evening, the rumour went around that I realised to get extra investments to transform the company. People did not longer discuss about layoffs but had a positive attitude to the difficult changes I had to implement.

(I also knew from that day that my desk space was not a secure place)

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen’s Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience three: Hurry up, I am beating you guys!

During another mission, I had to restart the sales team that was low performing. In my second month, I generated some interesting leads and I integrated the expected sales value in the sales tracking system. My deals were not signed and I did not communicate about it but the rumour went fast that I was getting the best sales person of the month which created a nice competition between the different sales people. The result was one of the best sales months since years and a motivated sales team.

(PS: my contracts got signed so I did finish first but what was more important was that 3 sales people also broke their personnel record – which they continued confirming month after month).

Personal thoughts: These items were fun to do as they worked as a motivator. It is important to realize that these initiatives have a very short lifetime (from one week to one month). You have to keep this very limited in time as these can create complex situations or turn into a negative atmosphere in the company.

22. Forcing Innovation

In turnaround situations, you have to force your company to think faster than competition. But that is not an easy task as you need to understand the primary drivers of what makes people think in your company. The fastest companies in the world have all an extraordinary ability to anticipate, to spot trends and create an environment that let the best idea win – regardless of its origin.

So it is up to you to force this – to make the ideas flow – or push your own innovation ideas throughout the team as an example so other ideas will follow.

All the major innovations I implemented were based on 3 elements: Simplicity, Confidence in our skills and speed to market.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience one: The empty idea box

It is extremely difficult to force people to think about things that could improve their work conditions. Everyone is acquainted to work in a certain environment and when something goes wrong, it is the fault of the upper management and their budget restrictions. And if the upper management proposes a new idea, they do not feel concerned as they are there to do their job and nothing more.

So to start a campaign of small improvements, I decided to install in the hallway an idea box to collect suggestions and ideas. Every Monday, I would list all the suggestions made to the whole company. The first week, the box was empty so I decided to fill in myself 3 anonymous notes and one fun note. I displayed these remarks on Monday and people noticed they were easy things to improve their daily work conditions. I collected a total of 26 suggestions in the next 2 months allowing me to create a company wide willingness to innovate.

Even the fun note (that I wrote) worked well as it requested to see me in the office without a tie. A thing I did 2 days later as it brought me closer to the team.

Field experience two: All glory to a Bonus

We needed to handle the migration of our in-house-developed invoicing system to the Euro currency. The first estimations of the IT project manager was that we needed one month to do it so it was never considered as a priority. I put 4 months before the famous switching date 2 small teams on it to detail it and to create a real project around it. At my surprise, they both came to me with a 9-month development plan. Not to say I was burning inside. How could they make such a mistake of telling me we could easily do it in one month and then get back to with an absurd project schedule.

I refused their proposal and I gave them 48 hours to find a solution, executable in less than a week. If they could make it, they would have a one-month salary bonus. If not, they were fired.

The first guy went to see his lawyer to avoid getting laid off which was of course a wrong attitude but the second guy took it as a challenge and he found the solution we needed. The next week, all development work was finished and all tests were successful.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

When I asked what he learned about this experience and especially the thinking out of the box, he answered very seriously... he learned nothing at all, he just needed the money as his wife was pregnant so it was worth making a one-shot effort.

After such an answer, I still wonder if bonus rewards can create innovation or if I have to wait again until someone's wife falls pregnant to get another "out of the box thinking".

Field experience three: Delivering an impossible project

One of the difficulties in turnaround missions is that you can be in a situation where you have to deliver an innovative software solution for a government agency ... and of course, there is no way to deliver it as the product just doesn't exist. Our best estimation was that we could make it in 18 months time while we only had 8 months available. The problem is we could not shorten our delivery time. Like I told many executives, I can create with one wife a baby in 9 months' time but even with 9 wives, I can never deliver a baby in 1 months' time.

So I had to be very creative and innovative to make things happen. The first one was an intelligent play to renegotiate the contract delivery date without paying penalties. It was not easy but we managed it to push the date by 4 months as we proposed some minor improvements to the sold contract (instead of 10 months, we were only lacking 6 months in time).

The second innovation was to rethink the specifications so we could do things quicker and easier. A lot of software specifications contain a lot of "nice to have" so we eliminated all of them so we only developed a product with "necessary to have" items. This allowed us to cut the number of days by 2.

My third innovation was to work closely with the users so we could work out easier some solutions. One of the elements we needed to develop was a double currency – French Francs and Euros – which would take us about 3 man months to develop. After 3 days work with the users (and all accounting staff), we arrived at a project that could be developed in also 3 days. We did this for several items.

The fourth innovation was on technology side. As we needed to deliver a solution that didn't exist before, we used technology in a clever way without taking risks. It allowed us to get quick results and to test the individual modules.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

This was important for us as our project schedule did not allow to test the complete system before the final delivery date. This was an extremely risky decision but I had no choice.

The fifth element was to deliver the product on the date of the new schedule but to keep the whole project team on stage so we could continue developing and correcting the product. The way we handled it was innovative as we kept the control of the system which was something very unusual in this context. My intention was to work on the feelings of the client to make him feel we were with him on this project and our reactivity should improve things quickly.

After a very difficult night where we assembled for the first time all modules and systems, the project went live on the expected delivery date. Through rethinking existing practices and innovating delivery, we managed to deliver the project in 12 months' time and extremely close to the original specifications. It was not a smashing success but our innovations allowed us to deliver and to avoid paying huge amounts of penalties.

Personal thoughts: Innovation is something difficult to control. The best thing a turnaround executive can do is to propose his proper innovation plans for the company but this is easy to say. I manage to do it but it is hard as my first innovation plans normally come after 6 weeks at the mission but I have been working 80 hours a week so I am more interested in sleeping than getting faster.

The innovations you have to implement do not necessarily have to be in the core competencies of the company (otherwise you can get the technical experts against you) but in a field that is very visible to the whole company. You can rework the graphical documents of the company, start with newsletters or you can for instance install some flowers in the office...

You can also innovate with new work methods, not radical but small changes that make an important visible change.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

23. Taking leadership

What is "Leadership"? A lot of things have been written down but I still think it is the opportunity and the circumstances that give someone a leadership role.

There is one leadership item I do not necessarily find in turnaround executives and that is "being a visionary".

In turnaround situations, the key word is "confidence".

A leader is the one that gets the confidence of everybody to take the company out of the bad situation. It not necessarily requires a vision of a promised land.

Field experience one: Leader of the strike

I was in an IT support business unit when I suddenly found out that they laid down work. The reason of this was the receiving of a note from the group CEO announcing a profound restructuring throughout the group. It also mentioned that in the new organization, all the IT support should be done from one single location near Paris meaning for the whole staff a moving to Paris or a layoff.

I was furious not being informed on that note as this note did not concern my business unit and I found myself with a strike.

I decided to have a frontal attack strategy so I told to the whole team what they were doing was against the law. They could not have a wild strike as the organization of a strike needs a particular procedure with specific forms to fill in. By not respecting this procedure, the human resource executive of the group can force me to fire them all as they refused to work and the group will send in a new team by the next morning which was no technical problem at all. And if they were kicked out, they could not get any unemployment fees as they were kicked out following a heavy professional mistake.

I told them I agreed with the reasons of their strike but we needed to follow the legal procedures and to prove I agreed with them, I would personally get the forms to fill in for them so they could have a legal strike.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

But I wanted them to start working immediately. They asked me 2 minutes time to discuss and announced me they restarted work.

When I arrived the next day with the forms to fill in... they did not wanted to fill them in and just gave me the answer: "the strike is not longer important. We are going to follow you as we know you are going to take us somewhere".

I was glad it stopped here as I don't know exactly how the group executives would have reacted knowing that one of their business units was on strike and the leader of the strike was the business leader himself.

Field experience two: Mister Monkey

I was in a reservation centre as I heard the supervisor saying to his staff that everyone calling in that afternoon were stupid monkeys. I was completely upset hearing a supervisor insulting our customers because our clients are always right. I was also upset as he did not take care of the problem itself. So I needed absolutely make him loose face in front of his team.

I asked what was happening and found out that people were calling our 0800 number as they did not find a destination on our Internet portal. I then asked to the supervisor to connect to our web site and try to make the reservation. He tried several times but did not find the destination ... so I concluded in front of his team that I have found someone who needed a lot of bananas as he just confirmed being a also a big stupid monkey. Everybody laughed and it was sure that the supervisor lost a lot of credibility to his team which allowed me to take control of the call centre.

The best thing is that they understood from that moment why I was pushing quality checks and from this incident on, they took the time to see if things the things they did worked as expected. Perhaps it was to avoid me finding a second monkey.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience three: Celebrating a funeral?

After the signing of a very big contract, the CEO gave a cocktail drink in the evening to all people in the company. Everybody was happy as this was really a big contract. I was the only guy that was not happy and even when I was obliged to be present, I refused to drink on it and everybody noticed it.

When people noticed this, they started wondering what was wrong. I just told them I did not know anything on the contract details and as our CEO never managed spreadsheets, I was very scared on the bad consequences for the company. I considered this party more as a funeral than a celebration.

Two weeks later, when we heard about the contract conditions, we all knew it was a financial disaster for the company.

Nobody believed any longer in the accuracy of the things our CEO announced and instead of bringing people together, he created a negative image of himself. At the next drink he organized, nobody showed up but that was not a surprise for me.

Personal thoughts: I don't know exactly what makes people to consider me as a leader. Especially during these difficult situations. I always stayed myself and I acted following my convictions. Perhaps it is just the fact I show them the way how to get out of misery.

It also requires a lot of self training to continuously look at the bright side of things especially as everything else in the company is bad, not to say disastrous.

By definition, a leader has to have a vision of the future. I don't think this is the case in turnaround situation. The only thing people want to know is if we are going to survive (unless this phrase could be considered as the definition of a corporate vision of the future).

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

24. Asking the questions you know

I have been many times in meetings or discussions where people think the CEO is the corporate guru ready to create the answers on their questions. In reality, they know the answer to their question but they want someone to blame for it if it doesn't work.

As a CEO, I regularly ask my team questions I already know the answers to, just to show them I am caring about their issue. Once they become a confident team, they know their strengths and weaknesses and they will propose themselves their proper improvement plans. And because the dialogue is there... they discuss initiatives so things start moving.

Field experience one: Network configuration

In one of my missions, I needed to design a complete network configuration so I gave it to our network administrator. He came up with a first proposal that I refused as being too expensive. He then asked me if I had a better solution and I told him yes but it was up to him to find the appropriate solution.

Two days later, he came up with the solution I wanted but I told him his solution was better than mine so it really became his solution. I empowered him and he was proud with the fact he could co-install the thing he designed.

Field experience two: Reducing incoming calls

In one of my missions, I needed to reduce the staff numbers of our call centre but we were receiving too many calls. Some project managers tried to do this but this never worked out. As I wanted to start with a first layoff of 2 people, I asked to have 2 volunteers from the helpdesk to create proposals and then implement them. In reward, they would receive an internal promotion as I was looking for extra people in our web content team.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

After 2 days, their proposal was simple as they asked me not to wait and to integrate immediately the web content team and create a web support site and a user manual to lower the number of incoming calls.

Result – the solution they proposed was the one I had in mind and I was glad they also asked my guidance to make their project a success. By not giving myself the solution – it now was their solution and they worked very hard as they had their own future in their hands. And this is what every manager wants to achieve.

Field experience three: Marketing campaigns

Due to the bad situation of the company, the number of marketing campaigns has gone down and the things we were doing was lacking a dynamic approach. So I wanted them to create a new marketing campaign and I gave them the headline. Up to them to develop it.

The first design was awful. I just asked them if they would buy the product if they say this advertisement. They hesitated... so I send them back to work on a new proposal. The second proposal was not much better so I asked them to change the background colour to make it livelier. In the third proposal, I asked them to change the fonts and to work so the image stressed the content of the headline. Result, the fourth solution was the right one.

It was hard as I knew what I wanted as a solution one month ago but now it was their solution and they were now able to work on other advertisements without my interaction. I just needed to give minor remarks but they were now independent and in charge.

Personal thoughts: For me, this is one of the most difficult things as I, as a turnaround executive, have to go fast to save the company. But on the other hand, I have to enable the team to make the difference and this takes time.

I always tell me the following story: "Imagine a team of 100 people that become more efficient and can win each week 5 minutes time. This means I won in that week a total of 500 minutes of effectiveness (meaning a full day of a person). Something I could never have done on my own.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

25. Creating incidents

A turnaround executive can't permit to make mistakes. If he does, he can take the company into a dangerous situation. But he can create accidents, conflicts so that things can become better afterwards.

All turnaround executives received their self-training from the mistakes they made in the past... so by definition, a good turnaround executive is someone that made an enormous amount of errors... and he learned a lesson from each of these failures.

A turnaround executive also has to accept that people can make mistakes so they can learn from it. Not always an easy task in a crisis situation where you have to calm down the atmosphere.

Field experience one: Making mistakes to learn

The IT division wanted to deploy a new application and when I analysed the deployment, I knew instantly that it would not work. Instead of stopping the project, I told them I had no time to look at it and asked them to deploy it, following best practices, only in one of our offices (the smallest one) and test the roll-back procedure. They delayed the deployment by 48 hours as they did not have a rollback procedure so they already knew they hadn't done everything.

Once they deployed it, it was indeed a major disaster as the whole office was out of work for more than 4 hours (even with the roll-back procedure that did not work). When things were fixed, I went to see the IT team and asked them what they learned and at my surprise, they already created a whole list of mistakes and created specific work methods to avoid these incidents in the future.

After the meeting, the database manager went to see me and told me he was convinced I knew it was going to be a disaster so he asked me why I let it go through. So I told him it was the most appropriate way for the team to discover they were doing a bad job, make them think about it so they could propose themselves new work methods. They became professional through their own mistakes.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience two: Stopping desktop support

As a subcontractor, I was executing an extremely bad contract as we lost a huge amount of money each month. From a legal aspect, I could not take the initiative to end the contract as we needed to pay extremely high penalties so I needed to force the client to resign the contract without creating a lawsuit. So the only thing I could do was reducing constantly the staff numbers. But the number of people got so low that we could not longer deliver decent IT services. Creating a network account for a new employee could only be done twice a week, desktop support was reduced to PC desktops leaving the Macintosh users without any support and we reduced the number of network printers to limit maintenance and interventions.

So we continued to create a more and more critical situation and the number of incidents increased. Yes we had to pay some minor penalties each case but we were loosing so much money making these penalties invisible.

After 6 months, the client decided to end the contract as we started to impact it's core services.

Field experience three: Lost sales proposal

The sales team created a sales proposal that could never work and was also uninteresting for the company. But they really believed in it so I decided to let them finish the job. When they got the message they lost the bid with the message the client did found it a bad proposal, I held immediately a crisis-review meeting to discuss the reasons.

I told them I spoke to the client (which was not true) and that they had lost on all issues like pricing, service and confidence.

For the next six hours, I forced them to rework their proposal and we came up with a pricing that was 30% lower and a presentation that by showing the innovative character of the company, had to create confidence. We also reduced the document from 150 pages to 45 pages. Also, the new proposition had value for our company as it had a normal pricing.

At the end, the sales manager concluded the meeting with "I never believed I could make so many mistakes in one single proposal. But we now have the weapons to win. In all cases, I am going to call the client tomorrow to excuse ourselves for our bad proposition and tell him we are putting in place a stronger team."

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Personal thoughts: forcing incidents is something difficult as you need to control everything up to the smallest detail to limit the impact. You should aim with high precision and know where the crash is going to be so you can be assured of the positive result(s).

Never use an incident strategy against someone or against a team. The only reason to let an incident happen is to be sure that you will have a positive payback for the company afterwards.

26. Burning the house down!

A lot of turnaround executives have the feeling they are born as “Fire-fighters” but in a lot of cases, I needed to light the fire to burn certain parts of the house to be able to create on the burned foundations, a brand new house.

This does not mean I do not need fire fighting but I needed to find the right balance between solving hot issues and letting certain things deteriorate so I could implement my drastic change programs.

Field experience one: Let it burn!!!

Every turnaround executive has the natural reaction to stop quickly all conflicts. But in some cases, I won important battles by waiting to interfere.

I once had a conflict between two executives I had to fire. So once they had a major conflict on one of my major changes and they were both sending mails around to find people that shared their view.

Even when several people invited me to participate in the discussion or to stop it, I did not interfere as they were discussing well between each other so they didn't needed a third person.

After 3 days of heavy arguing, one of the executives was so tired of it and resigned. Result, the discussion between both people stopped and I have realised half of my mission as I one of them was leaving without me paying a layoff fee.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience two: Quality Assurance Indicator

There was a major discussion between the product delivery manager and the call centre manager. For the first one, the new product was easy to use so needed a short user manual while the call centre manager wanted a full user manual. Knowing they both never agreed in the past to my propositions to implement test-sites as they had a vision they didn't needed user input as they both knew what the user wanted. So I didn't interfere and followed their discussion during several days. In the end, the situation went really bad as the people around them also got part of this conflict situation so I met both of them and we discussed for more than 2 hours. We got to the conclusion to implement first a test site and ask to the test-users their opinion if they wanted a long or a short user manual. Tired of all the arguing, I have obtained a change in their attitude they never accepted before: listening to what the users want!

Field experience three: Software deployment

When we needed to deploy one of our new ERP packages, we needed a manual intervention on all of our 1000 desktops. Everything was ready from a technical point of view – even with the procedure explaining the desktop intervention in detail.

The project problem was that the IT staff thought they were underpaid and requested a salary raise to execute this job. They also estimated they needed 2 weeks to do this job.

As these people already received a salary tip slightly above market rates and as the company had financial difficulties, I did not wanted to concede.

Result, we were in a blocked situation and I asked some time to find a suitable solution.

As I got the written procedure to execute the intervention on the desktop, I tried it when everybody left the office in the evening to get a first time estimation. It was so easy that I decided to continue until 3 a.m in the morning and deployed it on more than 150 desktops. The next night, I deployed it on all other desktops.

At our next meeting, I announced everything was deployed so I did not longer need them. They were not longer necessary in the process so up to them to take the decision if they still wanted to be part of the fighter's team. If not, I would call again the people that executed the deployment. The choice was theirs.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

For 2 weeks, the atmosphere was very electrical as they thought they were going to be replaced and I intentionally kept them in that situation. When I asked them to work on the deployment of another client-server package, they knew the “war” was over and that they could keep their job. I never saw a team so motivated on a project deployment.

Personal thoughts: it is extremely dangerous to light the fire as the heat can destroy quickly the whole company. But lighting the fire can allow you to get faster to healthy foundations to create a new company from the ashes.

But never forget that during the fire, you still need to deliver your products and services.

27. Portfolio problems

The portfolio problems can have many reasons you need to analyse in detail.

First range of problems is due to changes in the marketplace that have bypassed the company leaving it with sagging sales, lost market shares and a stock of unsold products. For some, the deficiency can be found in the technical fields (obsolete technology, old looking equipment...) while for others, the problem can lie in well-aligned sales, distribution or marketing fields. One thing is sure; the company hasn't kept pace with the needs of the marketplace.

A second range of problem could be due to explosive growth or the hitting of new markets. Companies achieving these fast growth numbers overlook the effects of growth with significant investments in R&D, new and modified corporate organizations (running 4 factories is more complicated than running one single plant...).

I have achieved regular revenue growth rates of more than 75% requesting me to modify the organization each 3 to 4 months to realign it with its size. I also blocked once all new orders for one month so we could clean things up and realign ourselves with the marketplace.

But portfolio management is interesting as it means the redesigning of products or markets, the detecting of new services, the revamping of sales or the reworking of product presentations and even the initiation of new distribution channels...

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

Field experience one: Portfolio aligning

As Turnaround manager, I was asked to open, in an extremely short delay, a new site in Asia. I discovered soon that we did not have the budget to realize this ambitious project. By redefining the portfolio of product and service delivery, I managed to deliver the services and products that were critical and important for that site. With only 30% of the needed budget, it became a success as the operations ran smoothly from day one.

But the project did not stay at this "minimum" package as it allowed us to reengineer our services so we added a lot of extra services in the first month. So the site became our experimental site to validate recent technologies.

Field experience two: Product killing

As Turnaround manager, I had to take a decision on 5 different product lines that were all losing money and market share. A finance audit would suggest stopping all 5 of them and closing the company but turnaround executives are there to create company survival.

After a profound product and market analysis, I decided to keep only 2 product lines. I streamlined the first one while I decided to revamp the second one. All employees were transferred to these 2 product lines and as there were now enough people available for each product line, we could deliver decent services. The product lines got redesigned (behind schedule) but it allowed us to gain some new market share again and to sell the company to a new group one year later. I was happy that against all odds, I have proven that the company could be saved – even when the merging required a 30% staff reduction (meaning I still saved 70% of the jobs).

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience three: Service Alignment

After 12 months on a mission, customer satisfaction stayed at a low level – even when we were delivering since several months good call centre services. So I took the decision to implement what I called “personalised communication channels”. I created different 0800 numbers for the different type of customers – with a different music and different ACD messages.

But the helpdesk stayed exactly the same, ran by the same people and without changing any existing procedure, the customer satisfaction indicators suddenly flew high up to become “best in class” as customers suddenly felt they were important for us.

Personal thoughts: Portfolio alignment is something difficult as it touches a lot of people that worked passionately on that product and its associated services. Killing a product is almost like killing their baby so you need to propose instantly a good alternative to them to keep everybody satisfied and avoids extremely negative reactions (like a strike or the destruction of material).

I also find it personally extremely interesting to take an old product, revamp it and introduce it again to existing customers. As always, there is a risk but it is worth doing it as you can keep existing clients satisfied.

28. Disaster recovery roadmap

As a turnaround executive, you have to take extremely important decisions in a very short time. This also means important changes and the taking of important risks on daily operations.

A crisis manager has no other choice as time is money, and he can only save some cash by using the time factor.

I had a lot of problems to convince shareholders to create decent survival policies as in many cases, they considered the company already as lost so they refused to invest in activities or resources that were not directly “cash” oriented.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience one: Fluent executing of an important layoff plan

During an important layoff (56% of all people), I took an important risk as reducing such an important workforce means the disappearing of important know-how. In some cases, the supervisor disappeared, in other cases his backup person but in all cases, we lost major knowledge as no procedures and methods were ever written down – and we did not even had the resources to write things down.

My solution was to create a “mobilization” plan for everyone staying in the company. An important bonus if things worked out fine, a short-term training plan, weekly reviews (taking 15 minutes per team) to discuss survival. I also worked with idea-boxes and complaint-boxes for those that did not wanted to tell their thoughts or feelings in public...

The layoff worked out well seen the circumstances as everyone understood that working together on survival was the only way to save the company.

Field experience two: going too fast

It is also possible that business goes too fast and you cannot supply the requested services. This is not a technical problem but a problem in finding skilled people – especially if you have to run a project in a rural area. People are not ready to move for some months while it is too far from a major city to do it every day by car.

You can't even hire temporary people as they don't have the necessary skills set – or if they do, are too expensive for the project in this rural context.

So the only thing you can do is create a disaster delivery map. You will deliver far behind schedule so you have to run the services in a disaster recovery mode. The file servers are not properly designed for the exceptional workload and the helpdesk will be overwhelmed with calls creating an important stress situation throughout the company.

But my disaster recovery map worked as we prepared ourselves for it. There were specific procedures, we had prepared specific emails to reply to our customers and our help desk was properly staffed to avoid an important crisis. We all did a best effort job – even when nobody was satisfied with it. But we got the deal and it allowed us to make some money and this is what counts.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience three: stop temporarily all IT security

I once found myself in a very difficult dilemma as the existing ERP system was breaking down many times a day causing many errors, mistakes and the loss of many customers.

I implemented a new IT infrastructure but I did not have enough financial resources as the banks (and shareholders) refused all types of financing. I decided to stop the hosting of our servers and implement everything internally... There was a lack of network redundancy, the file servers were not secured and we had not longer the money to invest in a backup system. We installed this kamikaze system in the hope to save the company knowing that any breakdown would close definitely the company.

We were successful as we did not loose any customer that month, and managed to get 60% of our lost customers back in less than 2 months. With the gain of revenue, we could increase little by little in higher security levels with a backup system, decent servers and implement traditional disaster recovery procedures. But the whole security process took more than a year.

Personal thoughts: Disaster recovery is something difficult to measure and to estimate. When I arrive in a full crisis situation, I have no other choice than a heavy cost cutting to save the company. I am fully aware that I am cutting all safety belts of the company but I hope I will be lucky enough to survive. Keeping the safety items will make the company to heavy to survive. It is like flying in a burning plane and throwing out the parachutes to make the plane lighter – hoping it will arrive at its destination.

In a second phase, when things start to be slightly better, everybody will be shouting to get money for salary increases. So even when I want to secure a little the company, I can't execute my plan as internal and political forces will be too strong. I continue hoping a disaster won't happen. I once had the choice in investing in a tape backup system or layoff someone. I took the decision to keep the employee for the time being.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

But my speech we needed to invest in key security for corporate survival was difficult and even when some people got convinced, the shareholders and the banks did not agree and wanted action ... so I kicked out two employees to purchase a tape-backup system.

I was completely against the reasoning... but that is shareholders language.

29. A smile to destroy resistance

Every turnaround executive will be obliged to take important and very unpopular decisions. The key element is to take these at the appropriate moment and with the good communication.

People can react in many ways so you should be prepared to all possible reactions.

Field experience one: Message Bombing

I received the day after announcing the first part of my major layoff plan (the one with the minus 56% of the staff), 6240 emails and more than 500 calls on my mobile phone. We had also 3 fire alerts in the building making all people leave the office building. I took the opportunity to have all people together and outside the building to discuss with everyone – very relaxed – about the future of the company. I also joked that with the number of emails, I had to have the most active fan club in Europe.

In the evening, I deleted all messages without reading any of them. If people had something important to tell me, I was sure they did it when we were all standing outside the building.

In another layoff case, my mailbox got spammed with lots of dirty and illegal pornographic mail (containing videos to fill quickly my corporate mailbox). I just went to see the IT guys to put in major filters directly on the messaging system so solve the issue (and to protect myself).

As I kept a relaxed attitude, people got convinced I controlled the whole situation so they decided to follow me (or at least, give me a chance).

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience two: Scheduling a carwash after each unpopular announce

I always schedule in my agenda the time for a carwash after announcing unpopular actions. The reason is simple as people think to hit me by pouring cheese, milk, and ice cream or even write some words with ketchup on my car. I don't care about it as I just go to the carwash as scheduled. My secretary is there to spread the word I knew it would happen like as I wrote the car wash in my agenda one week ago. And besides that, it gives me a reason to put a carwash on my expense report. To be honest, I am always glad these things could be solved with a simple car wash as they could also create real damage to my car.

Field experience three: Embracing attacks

The problem with emails is their speed of distribution and they way they can be spread uncontrolled. In a turnaround situation, it is difficult to control this communication and I once had a serious problem when another executive sending an email to the whole company announcing his disagreement with my turnaround plan.

I did not reply as I was sure he expected my reaction by email. Instead, I spend the whole day discussing very relaxed with everybody in the hallways, around the coffee machine (difficult to drink 15 cups of coffee that day) and next to the photocopy machine (taking photocopies as an excuse). I mentioned he wrote that email as he was worried as we all have our bills to pay and to raise our children. I explained very relaxed and with easy examples why his vision was wrong.

Result: at the end of the day, everybody was assured that my plan was the right one and found his way of acting ridiculous so he stopped his actions.

In reality, I modified my turnaround plan to take in account his remarks as they were very useful and well to the point.

Personal thoughts: a smile can do magic things. Even if you have to take unpopular decisions, stay relaxed and keep smiling. Communicate a lot in a structured way as it makes people aware that you

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

control the situation. People will hear to the one that shouts, not to listen to his message but to see your reaction. And there is where you can win the battle by staying relaxed and structured.

30. Do they know I am right?

Even when I am a turnaround executive with a lot of experience, I cannot manage all corporate fields. Some of the disciplines will need particular attention or they can even be so complex that I cannot handle them as an expert.

A turnaround executive can do a lot of things on his own to avoid expenses like writing and signing specific contracts without using a legal service. Of course, this is risky but what can I do else if there is no money left to call in someone else?

The other alternative, if you can and if you are part of a major group, is to negotiate some advice services much lower than market costs.

Never forget that you are playing with the survival of the company so don't play the corporate hero as the cemetery is full of corporate heroes.

Field experience one: Am I working on the right things?

I have difficulties in answering this question. Is it sufficient to see that things are improving fast to tell to everyone that I am working on the right things? No, it only indicates that I am not working on the wrong things.

It is one of my main fears as in a lot of cases, I have a fundamental conflict between what is good for our customers and what is good for our shareholders. In many cases, both can have a different view so I am in a difficult situation. Following the customers will create more revenue but also more expenses – but I will lose the support of the shareholders meaning the ending of my mission as I do not share their so-called long-term view (which is nothing else than cash and their short-term vision).

Following the shareholders recommendations will keep customers hungry as they won't receive the services as they want. Result, revenues will slow down and shareholders won't be satisfied either.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

I once created a strategic business plan to expand our business with a brand new product line but I needed funding for this. This new business line would create a new innovative image of the company and create an extremely higher satisfaction level for all our existing clients. But the main shareholder did not agree with my way of thinking as for him, innovation was linked with internal visible investments. He wanted that everyone in the company had the most recent desktop or laptop on his desk with colour printers everywhere.

After long discussions, shareholders forced their view and we changed all equipment – leaving budget left to implement my strategic business plan.

In the end, it did not create any value and did not give us any competitive advantage.

One year later, our competitor offered a thing close to my business proposal and they got very instantly the image of “innovating the market”.

I have a lot of difficulties as a turnaround executive to serve 3 masters: the clients, the company and the shareholders.

Field experience two: Murphy's laws

Everyone in the world knows that after Newton who discovered that things fall down) the laws of Murphy are the strongest ones. Things that should fall down don't do it as you expect and things that should stay up are already down before you noticed.

I have been running a company without any security on our file servers – and we never had a problem. Six months after the installation of a tape backup system, we had a server crash destroying the whole fileserver. I know, a server with a RAID configuration is secure, but for one reason we lost everything – even the RAID configuration of the hard disks.

I have been running a very complex national WAN network with more than 10 different WAN suppliers, giving us some minor problems but never a crash. For security and backup, we implemented best practice redundancy networks that were tested and approved. Six months later, the whole infrastructure broke down- including our backup lines and redundancy network. For 2 days, the whole company was down with zero revenue for those 2 days.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

It is a strange world we are in. If things are very fragile so they should break down and prepare us for a major disaster, nothing really happens. But once we implemented some stability so things could not break down, it broke down and created an important loss of money.

Field experience three: The corporate hero & willingness to change

In one of my turnaround missions, I was charged to open an office in Asia. The company should host immediately some 250 people. The problem with this project was a budget problem. Several companies applied to our call for tender but the estimations were more than 3 times above our budget limit defined by the shareholders (who were of course not aware of how much the opening of an office would cost).

So I was charged to propose a solution – I was the corporate hero and as I proved already twice that I could do miracles with extreme small budgets, they gave me one week to make it happen again.

I worked hard on this project and it was hard as for each issue, I needed to “think out of the box” to propose new solutions or use latest Internet technology to do the same for less money.

I focused completely on the value chain for our customers – and put money in this activity but for all activities that do not add any value, I streamlined all investments and costs.

Result, we had a building with less electricity and most network plugs were replaced with wireless solutions and avoided in that way a lot of cabling and network equipment. We also put several applications on the same server, reducing the number of servers from 7 to 2. We were not longer using corporate email systems but Internet email with associated mailing lists.

But the project did not work out as people did not adhere to the concept. They wanted physical wiring instead of wireless connections. They wanted office spaces with 3 people instead of 4 people per room. They wanted to use the Internet for individual usage – but not consider it as a professional tool to find information. The opening of our library catalogue through a secured web interface was considered as a way people could steal information.

I worked out a revolutionary technical roadmap – but I focused too much on the technical and budget aspects and did not focus enough on the promotion of the concept.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

As it was the end of my turnaround mission, my contract was finished and another manager took over the project to implement a “classical” solution, requiring 3 times more investment and that finally failed completely. At that time, people discovered my project proposal was the right one but it was too late to change.

Personal thoughts: it is extremely important to know your limits and your weak points. I have a good technical knowledge but I am not an expert. I can design high volume e-business platforms but I cannot tune them. I can write normal service contracts but I need to call in advice for major contracts or government contracts. I am also good in accounting – but weak in finance and taxes. I have been executing difficult merging and acquisition projects, but I need legal and financial advice to make things work out properly.

The problem with all of this it is that shareholders don’t necessarily see why someone experienced and skilled needs to call in from time to time an expert. In a lot of cases, the shareholders see this as a weak point or a turnaround executive that does not longer want to take his responsibility. This is wrong.

As a turnaround mission, I need to assure corporate renewal and not take any unnecessary risks. Like I once wrote in a note: “I know how to run a car. I also know how to build a car from all the pieces... but I don’t know how to build a gearbox neither how to fabricate the tires”.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen’s Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

Chapter 4: Lifestyle

31. Job around the clock

Each turnaround mission requires an extremely healthy executive as he will be spending long days, work 7 days a week, direct many meetings and resist to high pressure and stress.

So this is the way I organize my life when I start a mission. I will eat when I can and sleep when appropriate. I can be eating a steak and French fries in the morning, falling in bed at noon (with my clothes on) to get back in the office at 5 p.m.

Each turnaround mission is living the life of a soldier in a war period. Every moment of the day or the night is the right time to fight and sleeping is hardly allowed. A soldier does not count days neither hours, he counts victories.

Can you imagine I have been wondering once why there were some chocolates on my desk...to find out 3 days later that someone put them there for my birthday?

Field experience one: Optimising your lifestyle

It is important to be available as people expect you to be always in the office. You can push some of your personnel activities into the office – meaning you are in the office but at the same time taking a short relaxing period.

Arriving in the company before 7 o'clock in the morning, I start checking the situation of the company. I start to see if all IT systems are up and running and then have a look to the detailed sales reports calculated during the night to see if we are on target.

I then start reading some world news on the web (CNN, Yahoo! and Le Figaro) to be aware of the things that happened so I can eventually use it as a discussion item when the first people arrive in the office. It impresses the staff as you are aware of the latest news – and before they got it.

I also take 2 minutes at noon to read the latest news on the web. It relaxes me and if necessary, I can share the latest information at dinner.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

I take another break at 4 o'clock and go to the break-room eating an apple. I can see other people and discuss with them. This relax-moment takes only 5 minutes (unless I need to take longer to discuss issues with the people present) but it is enough to reload my batteries and continue working till the late night.

Field experience two: Never tell anyone you work at home

Life in the office is difficult as you are completely drowned in daily operations with phone calls and people coming in my office every 5 minutes. I need the time to focus on my files, like reviewing the latest P&L, validating a sales proposal, validating the specifications of a project or even writing some documents like action plans, updating a business plan... But it is almost impossible to work on a major file in the office.

So I stay once a week working at home in the morning so I can finish all important files. At the same time, my assistant will tell everyone that I am meeting a customer, the bank director... or sometimes that I am arriving a little later as I have been working whole night on a file. Take care never to tell anyone you are working at home as people expect you to be a fire fighter next to the fire – so inside the office walls. Being at home means you are weak and lack a high engagement towards the company.

Of course, when I arrive in the office at noon, I need to distribute quickly my work so everyone will notice that I have been extremely busy.

Field experience three: A night in the car

At important moments, you need to be “on stage”. At the “big-bang” deployment of our new ERP system, I lined up a night team and an early morning team. So I was there with the evening IT team and I also started with the installation on the packages onto the desktops until 2 a.m – the time the first IT team had finished their job. I took the highway to go home but I was so tired that I took a stop at the highway service station... where I felt asleep. I woke up at 6a.m in the morning and drove back to the office to restart the work of the early-morning deployment team – who was extremely surprised to see me at their arrival in the office so they told to everyone in the company I have spend the whole night in the company. That's extremely good for your reputation.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Personal thoughts: Turnaround executives have a hard life. I can continue 7 days a week for about 3 months before taking a 3-day break to sleep. The main risk of these turnaround missions is burning out or falling asleep when driving their car. Driving in the fast lane is not just a saying; it is reality as I am driving my car at maximum speed, far above the allowed speed limits. In one of my missions, I even hesitated to take a driver for safety reasons.

But it can be a nice business enabler as your high energy can motivate the whole company to work harder.

32. Sex as business weapon

Shareholders want to continue controlling the company so they implement networks to stay informed and they do not hesitate to use some sex as a business weapon.

Field experience one: Business School Interview

One month after my arrival, I got a call from a research assistant working on a study for a business school. She wanted an exclusive interview to understand how turnaround missions work.

I accepted this interview and received this beautiful lady. I did not trust her especially when she started to ask questions on how I saw the situation and how I was going to solve it. So I told her the story I wanted and especially the things I wanted shareholders to do if they want to have a successful turnaround mission. One week after the interview, a part of the shareholders changed their attitude just as I requested and it opened me the way to implement a new series of action plans. I turned their sexy spy against them.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience two: Sex around the clock

Working for a major group that invested in several start-up companies, six of them were in deep troubles even when we were all handling huge amounts of cash flows. The group wanted to give all 6 business units a chance to prove their liability and profitability and would take a decision to keep only 2 out of the 6 business units. So there was a lot of pressure and the group decided to call in 6 experienced change managers to take this challenge. In each case, the group was helping us by giving a personal assistant (not invoiced) and legal support at a very good rate.

I first refused the having of an assistant as I don't need someone to manage my agenda neither to type my letters. Also, I never trust something for free. But I was forced to accept her in my team so I gave her a cost-cutting role in general services.

After 6 months, we had our first board review and it was the first time I've met very briefly my colleagues. They were all surprised how well the board was aware of their business numbers – so they were convinced their company was important for the board. In my case, they knew my numbers but did not understand much of the core business. I questioned myself why I was in a different case so I concluded I needed to educate them so they could better understand my business but they did not react when I mailed them 2 weeks later a business presentation. It was at the 11th month of my mission that the bomb exploded as one of the assistants started talking. They were all send out to collect strategic information of the subsidiary and send it to one of the board members. They were told not to hesitate to start a relationship with the boss in exchange of a bonus. So this is what they did. But things were even a little bit more complicates as these assistants knew each others and they introduced each others to their boss. So there was a second circle of relationships and a lot of “corporate bed-confessions” going directly to the board.

I was never involved in any affair or conspiracy and my assistant never got enough information to tell to the board so I was sure there had to be somewhere else a spy in my company that was transferring the information. I still suspect the sales administration person as she had a view on a lot of numbers, was single and in less than one year, she changed her small car into an executive car. I never found out the truth.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

It took me some time to understand the reasons of all these efforts. I still don't know who was behind it. Perhaps one of the shareholders at group level to be able to control each business unit – or one of the business unit managers itself. It was a simple way to continue controlling the company at a weekly pace and to have a nice weapon to make the different executives fail and take their place in the end.

In the end, 4 of the 6 executives were forced to dismiss and their business units were instantly integrated inside the group and there was also a board member that left at the same moment. But as these things have been kept secret, I never knew who was behind this power play. Perhaps good as I was ready to use his head as a punching ball.

I finished my mission as scheduled with the requested results but since the "scandal" there was a lack of confidence so it was appropriate for me to leave at the end of my contract.

Field experience tree: Business proposition with nice car and beautiful model

I once started an extremely difficult turnaround mission in a company where everything was wrong and above all, had extremely heavy cash problems. Even when I made progress and had rude negotiations with the bank to keep the company alive, things progressed slowly and I was burning out very quickly. I then suddenly received a call from a female headhunter to start another mission which came for me at the right time.

So I went to see her to discuss this proposition and found out that there was a big sign-on bonus (a thing you rarely see here in France) and a luxury BMW (not to say the most expensive one). It made me suspicious as that price was too high to get a person like me in. My first investigations confirmed that the company in question had major problems and needed a new executive. I then bought some legal documents on the company and I was surprised to find there were family links with the main market competitor of my actual employer. This could not be a coincidence and perhaps my switching to a new mission was set up to by my main competitor to eliminate my actual employer.

The next discussion with the head hunter was held in the restaurant of the Eiffel Tower – not to say a very expensive restaurant in Paris. She was not only beautifully dressed but everything was extremely well organised. She was asking a lot of questions on how my company was doing, how I found new prospects and who they were... so all the questions a competitor would ask. I answered some of the

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

questions but I mentioned many times I could not give more details for confidentiality reasons. I was sure the discussion did not please her. In the middle of our discussion, she left 2 minutes for the ladies room and returned with a long-legged blond model in a very beautiful evening dress. The idea went through my head if they considered me as the new James Bond – beautiful cars and women, a luxury restaurant...so what was going to be their next move? Back to the lady, her story was that she just arrived in Paris and she needed someone to show her around the city the next days. I told them I was flattered and I found the excuse that I was leaving abroad for business to avoid taking her around. I gave her my office number so she could call me back. I then asked her more detail on the things I found out on the shareholder issue. She was embarrassed but I noticed not getting a straight answer so my theory could be right. We all left the restaurant half an hour later and I never got any news from them. By not wanting to play their game, I didn't get the job. Honesty doesn't pay but it kept me on the right track and I was motivated to continue my extreme difficult mission to the end.

Personal thoughts: I am perhaps too focused on my mission and the results I need to obtain. But it allows me to stay completely neutral if people invite me in a luxury restaurant (I like a good meal which is not necessarily an expensive meal), or wants to drive me around in their luxury sports car. Of course, I am not against the fact receiving beautiful sales women in my office but signing a contract still depends on the contract conditions and details.

My honesty kept me alive, kicking and straight. Perhaps I could make more money, drive real executive cars and have some fun but in the long run, I know I won respect and I can say everybody that I am straight and honest. That is not what all managers and executives can say.

33. Changing shirts fast

A turnaround executive has to adapt himself very quickly to the fast moving environments of his mission. This can be extremely interesting as it requires to use a very large skill set to a wide variety of business and management issues.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience one: 4 sequel positions

Due to a take-over of a subsidiary, the historical directors decided to leave and the files transferred to a new management team. The time to get this new management team on board, I had to take temporarily 4 different positions. I started with the position of sales director during 2 months. Without a real transfer of his files, I took the position and I even increased the sales performance of the whole sales team and I implemented a new, more efficient reporting system. The day the new sales director arrived, I swapped to the finance director position for 2 months allowing me to clean up a lot of files and collect a lot of unpaid invoices. I optimised daily invoices and payables before handing over all information, records and procedures to a new manager. I then took the technical director position for two months and installed some best IT practices and better teamwork. I ended with the marketing position for two months. The marketing position was the most difficult one as this relied most on a profound knowledge of the marketplace – which I can't influence so easy being a brand new transition manager.

This one year mission gave me a great feeling as I did not only kept things rolling, it also gave me the impression I managed everything in the company (to finish the year with good P&L numbers).

Field experience two: from operations to management

In one of my missions, I found myself using one single subcontractor for all IT services. Due to a sudden financial problem on their side, they did not pay salaries to their employees and all their 20 people left our premises the next 10 days. This left me with a very short delay to find a brand new IT department, transfer some critical information and to keep IT up and running.

In the morning, I worked in the call centre to monitor (and solve) the problems and to transfer the issues to the new dedicated resources. At 11 o'clock, I swapped to the server farm to work with the team and to solve as many issues as possible. In the afternoon, I arrived at the desktop team and helped them with the installation of desktops. In the evening, I worked on the quality procedures that I distributed the next day to reduce as fast as possible the number of problems.

My hands-on attitude allowed me to integrate quickly the different people – coming now from different companies. Also, as I was fighting on the frontline, they saw I was taking the major parts of the critics and responsibilities so they could have the time to be integrated inside the daily operations of the company.

It was an interesting mission as I was moving all the time and handling all the aspects IT can handle in a day.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience three: a company on his own

I hear a lot of people saying that I am a company on my own. Of course, this is not true but I can direct indeed a lot of different corporate fields. I can configure desktops, install servers and even some network equipment. I can create user specifications for major projects and design the architecture for new applications.

I can sell like a sales person, I create newsletters for the PR department and I can create contract documents. I can also read in detail the accounting reports or track the supplies in our inventory system. I can renegotiate procurement contracts and find new markets in Europe to distribute our products. This all makes me plugable where the company needs me most (or where people need me most). Of course, I am not longer installing desktops or developing software programs but everybody knows I am able to do it so when we have technical discussions, we instantly focus to the real issues.

My intention is not to be an expert but to understand every detail of the company so I can be the one that can push the company to new limits and by making everybody working smoothly together. I also want to take care that each person has the right information at the right moment.

Like I used to say a lot – I am just the oil that goes everywhere and makes the engine run smoothly but they all are the parts of the engine that have to work together to make the car move ahead.

Personal thoughts: A lot of transition managers will tell you their interest in changing roles. You have a lot of people that can do sales, some can combine sales and management but it is hard to find someone that can make it from sales to IT, from marketing to human resources. I also like this challenge of having multiple positions inside the same corporate life.

34. High-speed rescues

Depending on the stage of your turnaround mission, you will look differently to the future. In the beginning, a long-term strategy can cover 24 hours... Yes, just trying to survive one day. After a short while, an action plans that start covering a week before arriving at something that covers a full month. The view of the future is changing at each stage of the mission.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience one: Long term = half a day

In one of my first missions, I found myself in a major mess as nothing was organized or scheduled. I found myself in a “fire fighting” situation, not knowing which emergency we needed to handle in 15 minutes’ time – not even knowing if we finished handling the problems we had 15 minutes ago. So I implemented a short-term action plan ... to survive the next half-day. I arrived in the morning with the will to get things going until noon and starting the afternoon to keep things going until the evening. I did this a whole week long and I took the time during the first weekend to scan all the incidents of the week to find as many numbers as possible. Then I rated the incidents on the speed we could solve these and created an action plan for the next Monday. I identified the tactical triggers that could solve each crisis item or incident. This action plan was for the whole team but also for myself. The next weekend, I reworked my previous action plan as the incidents were different. I did this every weekend and at the end of the quarter, I started to scan the problems every 2 weekends, as things were already better. After 6 months, I got to monthly action plans.

Field experience two: Long term = one month

In another mission, the company was spending so much time solving customer problems that all other services – like innovating or creating growth were suffering heavily. My strategy was to lower the monthly number of incoming calls by 15% each month. I analysed all the incoming calls of the week. Once analysed, I created each month a specific action plan like modifying the organization of our call centre. But the most important issue was the tactical implementation of a series of newsletter to solve the top one weekly issue. Every Monday evening, we distributed a newsletter dedicated to the top one problem of the past week. I created 16 newsletters in the first 4 months and the call centre started working normally. After 4 months, we only reduced our incoming call volume by 25% but the support service had become a good interface with our customers.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen’s Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

Field experience three: Second try turnaround mission

It happened to me that after a first turnaround mission, the situation improved significantly as we were delivering decent services and products allowing us to increase our revenues. The only problem was that we were still losing a lot of money and I executed once again a second turnaround mission by replacing the existing subcontracting services by new ones.

The most difficult part of this project was the change of pace as people were used to go from daily action plans to monthly action plans ... creating a feeling of stability inside the team. By destroying everything and going back to daily action plans, people had the impression we were going back to hell.

Personal thoughts: One of the interesting parts of a turnaround mission is to see the company changing from a continuous crisis situation into a stable company. The sliding from constant minor action plans to major, mid-term action plans. An atmosphere that changes from a hope that things will get better one day to a perception that things are already better. The feeling that fire fighting is finished and people are putting the first bricks in place.

35. Sleeping like a baby

One of the extremely important things for a turnaround executive is to resist the stress of the job. And there is a lot that can cause stress situations.

First, there is the fact that you are there to take unpopular decisions. You are there to do the cleaning previous executives didn't do. You are also there to try to save the company from bankrupt so money will be difficult to find and you can't say to your employees you can't pay them at the end of the month (of course, if you have to you should do so but at least be honest with everybody). You also have to negotiate with suppliers the payment delays of their invoices – mentioning regularly that your bank made a mistake otherwise you should have paid them. There are also all the legal issues that are so complex you find yourself lost at every instant.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide eBook

There are also the last-minute emergencies that oblige you to travel so you can't be there to celebrate the anniversary of your son. And of course, your spouse will not speak to you for several days due to your professional obligations...as she of course does not understand what it is to be a turnaround executive.

It all uses your energy so you need to recharge quickly your batteries so it is important to sleep well. I have no problems (it is my company) so I sleep like a baby.

Field experience one: How many people did you kill?

I changed a lot in the way I looked at my professional situation as I met an interesting executive during my first turnaround mission. Every time we had a crisis (like the breaking down of our email system or our invoicing system) and I ran to solve the problem, the executive in place (an ex-Boeing software executive) asked me how many injured people we had with the incident and how many people I thought we could save by running fast in the hallways? As I said "zero of course", he replied saying there was no reason to run.

A turnaround executive (for him) was not in an airplane losing height rapidly but in the control tower so our mission is to give a very controlled way, guidance to the pilots so they could save the plane.

This phrase made me think and indeed helped me a lot afterwards. I kept running to solve the issue, but I was not scared any longer as I knew nobody would die. And it also made me sleep well from that moment.

Field experience two: Living with job uncertainty

Every executive in a Start-up environment has experienced difficult moment where it was completely uncertain to know at the end of the month how to pay the employees. This never worried me as I knew my turnaround mission was a temporarily job so I was glad to push every week the fatal date with one week. But if everything had to stop tomorrow morning, it would not bother me. I have a wife and 2 children so I could spend more time with them.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Of course, due to the bankruptcy, I would be a bad reference for my career and I could probably for several legal reasons not hold another executive role for the next years but this is not critical as I can also be a number 3 or 4 in a company.

Field experience three: Legal worries

In all of my turnaround missions, I had legal challenges to solve. In all cases, people mentioned regularly that they had a case against me that would bring an executive in jail for lifetime.

It never worried me as you don't go in jail for lifetime if you didn't do anything criminal.

I also arrived after the facts. I am an honest person as I do not mix with sales numbers, I do not change accounting numbers neither change legal documents (I've seen other executives doing this and even win legal battles with fake documents).

If I find a problem, I contact the regulation body to alert them of a mistake we made in the past and that I want to see with them how we could make things clean together. If there were errors that made us pay fewer taxes in the past, I made the change and paid the penalties. Yes, I discovered I had not the permission to make people work on Sundays neither woman at night so I contacted the legal agency to study the problem. Of course, as all these issues can be complicated so experienced attorneys always assist me.

Personal thoughts: You have to remember that a turnaround executive will never go in jail as long as he stays honest and respectable. This is important as you can find a lot of terrible issues and people will threaten you with jail sentence.

Also, as turnaround executive, you are fighting for the company but it is not your company so if you fail, you will lose your honour and not your life.

36. Protect your ass as the heat is on!

The life of a turnaround executive is very difficult and you can find yourselves having many different feelings. You have to avoid the next feelings:

- 1) *The black sheep: you feel everyone is against you and nobody listens to you.*

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

- 2) *The ostrich: you are tired of discussing and negotiating and you want to have a break. You let things going on – stick your head in the sand - and stop being the key player in the different meetings.*
- 3) *The catalogue: you put people in boxes as workers can't think, the finance people don't even know what we produce....*
- 4) *The frenzy: you get panicked, want to go too fast and forget your traditional work methods, to prepare your meetings, to follow in detail action plans...*
- 5) *The padlock: after some heavy discussions, everyone feels that the case is lost and no one wants to move ahead any longer.*
- 6) *The blame-box: after a major problem, everyone starts blaming each other of a particular failure and this generates to all daily operations.*

I have been in all those situations but as soon as I realized myself I got in such a situation, I changed my behaviour to create a new situation.

Field experience one: The blame-box => padlock => ostrich

This field experience is was the last experience as a "normal" manager and made me become a crisis manager.

Due to the importance of the investments, I was obliged to group 4 different projects inside one single project run by a very mixed project team. While we moved ahead fast, we arrived at the end with the deployment of the first test site and suddenly, everyone started blaming each other. For instance, 2 groups refused the specifications they validated 2 months before saying they only validated the document and not the content. Every detail was a mistake forced by one of the other project teams.

The only solution I found was to split the project team that worked fine since the beginning into the 4 different projects but this created a completely blocked situation as no one wanted to be the first entering the test phase of the program. Result, we also redefined the user groups entering the test phase into independent groups. On the day we wanted to deploy the test site, we arrived in a new blame-box situation as the day before, the company announced a major merging program. The project went from a communication-oriented project to a pure political project so I gave up. I didn't consider it any longer as my project and I found myself in the ostrich position.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

The whole issue was discussed at group level that week and the board decided to delay the whole program. I left the company 2 months later and the program got deployed 4 months later without any change and without any problem but with a complete new project team.

Field experience two: the unions

A lot of turnaround executives have a lot of problems with the unions as they have a strong position in the company and a direct line to the feelings of the employees. But the unions are against the bosses and you present “the boss”.

I do not have a strategy against the unions but I do everything for the company – so also for the employees. My engagement and openness makes it that people come to me before going to the unions so I can handle their issues before they became a problem.

In my first turnaround mission, I found out we had not the legal permit to deliver our support services on Sundays. So I filled in the forms to get it and once the request published, I also needed to inform the unions what I did. But of course, the unions reacted so I had to appear before a judge to explain illegal work conditions. I risked a lot as I could lose with this the legal control of the company.

The case was solved very quickly as I explained to the judge that the situation existed since years, without any intervention of the unions, and I personally took the case in hand only one month after my arrival and it was me personally that wrote the letter to the government body asking to accept the exceptional working conditions of the company. We had to deliver services on a Sunday. So I was not forcing illegal work conditions but the one that wanted to respect the law and find a solution that could suit all. I got the permit two weeks later.

At my second mission, I was surprised with the issues of my first monthly meeting with the unions. All issues were around the lack of motivation of the executives to deal with important issues. When I saw the list, it was ridiculous with things like missing toilet paper in the ladies room and some broken light bolts. So I left in the mid of the meeting telling him I needed to fix an urgent problem so I went to the ladies room with the supplies. I returned in the meeting telling them the issue was solved and it should be the mission of everybody, including the unions, to fix problems.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

I then created special communication channels to avoid that people went to the unions as I was handling the problems faster and listening to them. By taking care of people, people also took care of me.

Field experience three: The duel

In one of my missions, there was an enormous cash flow but the company was making heavy losses so I decided to call in an expert to analyse all financial transactions of the past 6 months. And indeed, we discovered fraud and unexplainable expenses. There was the purchase of an executive car that never arrived in our assets and nobody was driving. There were also 3 desktops and 4 file servers that we purchased, but that never arrived in our asset records neither in our office.

Before I could act and escalate the problems, the shareholders created a file against me by opening a Swiss bank account on my name (with an imitation of my signature) and they transferred some large amount of money on it, which was taken of some days later. For them, they had the evidence I was involved in a Fraud activity so they would do nothing as long as I stopped my activities to clean the books of the company.

For the next 9 months, we were holding our guns between each others eyes and with the finger on the trigger... and this is the atmosphere I executed my turnaround mission. I was glad to end my mission and even I improved significantly the financial situation of the company (not to say I have saved it), I still hate the company and I would not cry if it went bankrupt one of these days.

Personal thoughts: It is difficult to have confidence in board members after such negative experiences. Politically protected, these burglars make money by stealing from what could be a well-running company. It is difficult to work for such guys and I would have quit without notice if I just had the financial resources. But I couldn't as it is difficult to find turnaround missions and leaving a turnaround mission without a smashing success is bad for my reputation... so I had to continue against my will.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

37. Impossible Self-training

There is not really a school that can educate you in being or becoming a turnaround executive. It is true you need a lot of experience, a wide set of skills, a high working energy, a constant availability. But a turnaround executive is always too busy to read or to follow training courses.

So it is extremely difficult to find information and training that can extend the skill set of executives. The objective of this training is clear – becoming stronger.

I don't agree with business gurus that tell you people can't be changed. A turnaround executive constantly shapes a wave of innovation that will motivate people to follow. Perhaps you don't change them much, but they change attitude.

To realise this, you need tons of knowledge to:

- *Unlock your true potential (character, decision making, problem solving...)*
- *Understand people (detecting motivation, building relationships, negotiating...)*
- *Run the business (entrepreneur skills, communication, team building...)*

But it is a vicious circle. The more you learn, the better you learn to know yourself and your skills but at the same time, you are aware you have to learn a lot more. It is an endless road to nowhere... but you have to learn to stay on the road.

This difficult learning process can be exercised, in particular, through literature and engaging yourself in a constant dialogue with your peers, advisers, consultants, team members, suppliers, customers, and competitors.

My first thoughts on project success

As a young engineer, I lost a project due to the technical complexity and I decided to take a small break in Paris. During my visit at "Le Louvre" museum in Paris, I was surprised to see all the paintings showing the victories of Napoleon. It surprised me as I learned in school only 3 war-events: the

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

defeats in Russia, Trafalgar and Waterloo. So he was a loser and a winner at the same time so I wanted to find out in detail what made him loose these 3 battles. Was it an issue of strategy, war preparation, alliances, infrastructure, and efficient teamwork, acting at the right moment? Napoleons' troops were normally strong on all those fields.

The results I found were extremely interesting from a management perspective as the defeat was a combination of all those elements. The fact the available resources were not properly mobilised made Napoleon loose.

It created me an awareness that victory of a project and a mission was found in a fragile balance between all resources and not the strength of the resource itself.

Field experience one: Change management failures

I was always on the forefront of implementing latest technology, not as a gadget but as a real industrial system. But I had a lot of difficulties to implement my projects as it was at each step demanding major change management.

When I first introduced the concept of an Intranet, I spend only 20% on the project itself and 80% in explaining technology. The director of internal communication was against it as it would replace his internal notes... and perhaps even eliminate the job of his internal writer. The director of IT was against it as you could only run serious projects from a mainframe and certainly not from a unix-based system.

People were also using different vocabularies so when I mentioned people would navigate on the Internet, several board members were scared to loose people for hours on the see of information before they came back to the office to continue their job they were paid for. It needed a lot of explanation.

It were all minor elements that needed particular attention so we could implement a major change program.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

So to run this project, I did read a lot of technical specifications to know how Intranets work but I spend most of my time reading on how we could :

- *convince people to adhere to a project*
- *convince people to accept change*
- *convince people to be an active actor in implementing change*
- *create a value proposition for everyone*
- *detect unanswered questions (rumours) that could harm the project*

I think I have read about 15 books in 3 months time on change management and crisis management but even when they gave me a solid framework, they did not help me much in my daily operations. The best solution I found was to meet the people individually and discuss the issues with them. Because each discussion was a way to solve an issue or to detect a hidden problem.

Field experience two: Fast “Image”-reader

Between two missions, I spend a lot of time reading – but reading fast. I took the rule not to spend more than 3 hours on a book – meaning I can handle 3 books a day when going to the library.

I read fast, take some time to read in detail the content table and then read fast. I particularly concentrate on the images and charts. I instantly take notes and I photocopy the most interesting charts/images I want to keep for my reference.

The next day, I take my notes and the photocopies and repeat the whole story as told in the book.

Field experience three: Chinese turnaround executive

I also learned a lot by discussing with a Chinese turnaround executive. We exchanged a lot on the way we treaded our missions and I was surprised to find out his philosophy of “Yin and Yang”. His Tao view of doing business was similar with I was implementing – except he had a framework. Creating a company from the outside in (Yin) or from the inside out (Yang), creating growth through efficiency improvement (Yin) or through venturing and speed (Yang), working in your business (Yin) or on your

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen’s Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

business (Yang), adapting to change (Yin) or creating change (Yang)... it all got a place in his framework. I am just doing things as I think they should be done.

Even now, several years after our discussion, I get back to his framework when I am experiencing a difficult situation. The way of putting some of my things inside a Tao framework allow me to see things better so I can start creating my own framework for future actions.

Personal thoughts: I did not find the right training school to create turnaround executives and the business world needs them. Even if a lot of transition managers are highly experienced executives, I am sure a lot of them would not survive in the extreme turnaround situations I experienced.

At several occasions, I would have been glad if there was someone to speak as each conversation can guide me a little through the Amazon forest of my turnaround missions.

It could be interesting to get more turnaround executives by training some of the most interesting high-flyers to learn how to handle difficult crisis situations – or at least, train executive not to destroy their company so turnaround executives are not longer needed.

38. The Lone Rider

The role of a turnaround executive can be very difficult. From one side, he can be obliged to destroy a part of the team spirit to ease the layoff plan while on the other hand, he needs to motivate the troops to rescue the company.

As executive, he has to be close to the people – but at the same time keep a certain distance as he has to stay the “boss”. He has to be the “tough guy” and the “nice guy” at the same time.

The first turnaround executive I met in my life was Scottish and he told me : "The most difficult thing in a turnaround mission is that you cannot touch Whiskey. Each day, I would love to drink a complete bottle of it. But I can't as I know it will destroy me and make me fail my mission but the temptation is there every morning".

I have to admit it took me some time to understand his words but he was telling the truth. I have seen many Turnaround executives disappearing with a bottle under their arms and I agree there is a major temptation to touch alcohol during a turnaround mission.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience one: Nobody loves me

It will be no secret – nobody will love a turnaround executive. A lot of people will try to be nice to you as they fear to be fired – so their strategy is to be close to the boss. It works in a lot of cases but not in my case as I am looking for motivated and brilliant people. People that do their job, that take initiatives and exceed regularly their performance levels. Paying me a cup of coffee in the morning is nice... but it doesn't make him/her a perfect staff member.

It will also be difficult to keep very good friends. You can be send to a turnaround mission some 1000 kilometres away and as you will be working 80 hours a week, no time to maintain contacts. Also, most people likes to have friends that are stable and a turnaround executive is someone that runs from one place to another so by definition, not a very stable guy.

Why people find it normal that a plumber can go from one house to another to execute his fixings while an expert cannot go from one company to another?

Your family will also consider you as someone that can't maintain him in a position. Someone that takes a mission but fails each time as he will be looking every 18 months for a new job.

You will have the same difficulties in business life as you experienced so much cheating and power plays, people that behave differently in front of you... that your first reaction will be the creation of a distance just to see what the person in front of you really wants.

So you will be lonely. Very lonely.

Field experience two: The silence of friends

My second turnaround mission ended with a conflict with one of the other executives. I was already transferring all my files to him and my mission was almost finished but he wanted to show everybody he was the strongest and he was mastering every detail of IT.

If you really have the power of leadership, you don't have to prove it.

When the conflict broke out, I was surprised he terrorized a lot of people that kept a terrible silence. A silence that worked against me as the people that were always supporting me did not speak.

In the heat of the battle, I had no longer people ready to help me or to speak for me so it was indeed time for me to leave. I did not fight back as the end of my contract was only 2 months away and all objectives were obtained with glamour.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

But I was extremely lonely at that moment even when people continued telling me they were against my contract ending... but they did not tell this loudly to others.

Field experience three: Difficult networking

One of the difficulties is that you work in a turnaround environment and your missions only take 12 to 18 months. Every time, you are forced to change environment and interact with new business partners. In one position, you will interact with finance people while 2 months later, one the finance part is stable, you can be working almost exclusively with IT people to develop new products. Once done, you need to bring it to market and spend your time with eBusiness executives and retail people. The relationship with headhunters and interim recruitment companies can also be extremely complicated. They can see your great numbers but they don't necessarily know where to place you. As executive, are you more Sales, Finance, Information Technology oriented? You proved you can work under difficult circumstances and create fast results - but does this means you can be integrated in the particular crisis atmosphere of their client?

As a small giant doing everything, I am too small to be noticed by the giants but at the same time, I am too tall for the dwarfs. So I am somewhere the king of the borderline between 2 worlds.

Personal thoughts: I am a very sociable person but I keep my distance. When I start a new turnaround contract, I don't know who the power players are, who is cheating, who is nice or who is just giving me the impression of being a nice person. They will all tell me being hard-workers but I don't know who are the key people that keep the company up.

I also know that I have to be strong as there will be nobody to help me when I have a weak moment. So I am a lone rider driving in the fast lane of the executive village.

39. Dying without flowers

In the end, a turnaround executive dies. Tired, exhausted....burned out. So he need to take some time off to recover from the 39 lashes he just received. Nothing is clear about the ending. Sometimes things are ending fine, in other cases, the end turned into a kind of vacuum situation where nobody cares his funeral.

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

In all cases, I transmitted all my files, records and notes to the new management team so they could continue to write new lines on the corporate story. But I am not sure that all of them deserve it.

Field experience one: No bonus

I don't like the bonus system that shareholders propose – especially not in turnaround situations. Many shareholders use the bonus system to keep an executive in the company until a certain date or to lower his salary as they will never pay the bonus. It is a bad business habit.

In one of my missions, I had to realize a turnaround situation in 18 months time. I managed to change the company, industrialise it and save lots of money but the shareholders, assisted by 4 attorneys, created a major conflict so they could stop my mission after 15 months so they did not needed to pay my turnaround bonus. After those 15 months of complex restructuring, I was only 1% off my target revenues and 1% above the estimated operational expenses so everything indicated I would succeed my mission. But no, they liked to stop me just to avoid a bonus and to put the son of the main shareholder on board. The attorneys did a good job as it was extremely complicated for me to go to courtroom to request my bonus. I did my job but don't ask me to start again a new mission for these shareholders. To be honest, I would even like to see them go bankrupt in the near future.

Field experience two: Helping the Sales Force

In another mission, I finished my last month as sales representative. It allowed me to give full responsibility to the new management team as I was mostly out of the office. It also allowed me to gain respect as I signed new deals to become the best sales representatives that month. People were surprised, as they knew me as a “pure cleaner” and not as a business developer working for the sake of the company. They suddenly understood that I had something special and that I was working for everyone (and they were even surprised to hear I had no sales bonus on signed deals).

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: [+44 203 137 2581](tel:+442031372581)

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Field experience three: To tired to survive

In one of my missions, I managed to save a business unit from bankruptcy but it took me all of my energy as I worked intensively during 6 months. Intensively means working hard and more than 80 hours a week. Arriving at home at midnight and leaving at 5am in the morning, I only saw my children sleeping in their bed. On a more physical side, I have lost 16 kilograms of weight in those first 6 months and started the second phase of the rescue plan – creating growth – completely exhausted. I After those 12 months, I knew I had saved the company but I was too burned out to push the company to yearly growth rates of more than 70%. My growth numbers were only 58% which was too low for the shareholders to continue. Instead of giving me a small break, they just gave me a handshake mentioning – the time to change has arrived again. And they replaced me.

Personal thoughts: You don't become turnaround executive to hear you did a good job as nobody will tell you that. The people that employed you are too embarrassed to have used your services – so they don't tell anyone they know you. They will rarely recommend you to another employer as it means they had a "weak" moment in their company.

A turnaround executive has to hold a very visible position to save the company, but once things get better, he has to become transparent before complete invisibility.

The cemeteries are full with corporate heroes. People that died for the sake of a company. But you will never find a dead turnaround executive as after doing a great job, they always disappear in the fog. Perhaps one day, you will find on a gravestone the following text

" Here is the empty grave of T.E. .^o

We don't know exactly what he did or how he did it.

But he just did it ...before leaving for another mission. "

^o T.E. = Turnaround Executive

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND

CEO Worldwide eBook

Epilogue

So this is it. I finished this blogbook (a book written in blog-style) and confessed you the things that happened during my different turnaround missions and tricks I used to survive. I always tried to be the nice guy, certainly not the mean one but the exceptional situation required major actions.

Not all turnaround or transition missions are as tough as the ones I collected and I have no idea what my next mission will be. Probably it will be again a difficult and complex mission. And even after 4 successful company rescues, I have no idea if my fifth one will make it happen again.

I don't know exactly what my next turnaround mission could be. I still dream of a high visible turnaround mission that could create respect for the things I do. I am also dreaming of a mission in a different field, just to prove to all people that turnaround executives can operate in any market place. Why not working on the comeback of an event hall, a fading nightclub or bring a disappeared rock group back into the charts? Why not working for a formula one team to restructure it so it will win again races and glory? Or why not taking charge of a failing football team and bring it back to the Top3. There could also be a +50% of growth of a major retailer in less than 18 months. These are all interesting missions for very experienced people. Risky with lots of pressure but delivering a lot of renewal opportunities.

Oh, I can always dream and while you are reading this book, I am perhaps working already on a fifth difficult turnaround mission in a technology-based environment. Once again, I will experience a new set of 39 lashes. I will be shot again, bleeding and use other tricks to survive.

In fact, I don't know if you have noticed it... but I delivered you 40 items and not 39 (you have twice the number 19) as a turnaround executives always has to deliver above expectation. But nobody notices it. Did you?

And to give you a last confession... I am not French but that's part of the mystery and my way of disturbing my environment.

You have permission to print this. The right to make changes or edits to its contents or digital format, to translate it or to bind this and sell it as a book, however, is strictly reserved.

Book registered under: ISBN = 2-9526170-0-7 EAN = 9782952617000

Written by Erik Van Rompay, iCEO # 13126

Contact us!

Phone: +44 203 137 2581

Email: search@ceo-worldwide.com

Website: www.ceo-worldwide.com

CEO Worldwide Ltd - 9 Queen's Yard - White Post Lane, London E9 5EN, ENGLAND