Creativeship

Lessons for evolving leaders.

by Bob Kelleher

HOW CAN LEADERS build sustainable cultures and business models? In my book, Creativeship, I tell the story of retiring management consultant Joe Daniels who is anxious.

Driving to his retirement party with his purpose-driven daughter Heather, who represents millions of her millennial peers, sets Joe off on a series of epiphanies, flashbacks, conversations, and revelations. He sees signs that his idea of leadership can’t sustain business.

Leadership, Joe realizes, has morphed into Creativeship—the need to build sustainable cultures and business models. The collapse of ENRON, World Com, and Arthur Andersen has afforded a painful glimpse at what happens when firms become so focused on profit that they lose their moral compass and forget the purpose. Creativeship questions the old definition of leadership, providing a roadmap to a new paradigm that organizations must embrace to thrive.

Invest in Six Priorities

Though Joe is a fictitious character, his experiences, anecdotes, lessons and
recommendations are real. Through his story, we learn that to be sustainable in this world of technological advances, globalization, shifting economic drivers, changing workforce demographics, and corporate social responsibility, firms need to invest energies and resources in six interrelated Creativeship priorities:

1. **Purpose.** Generation Y is motivated by purpose. A parallel trend is the vital role Baby Boomers are playing in leading corporate social responsibility. After years of focusing on wealth accumulation and career advancement, boomers are re-focusing their priorities. This dynamic, dramatized in conversations between Joe and his daughter, is common.

2. **Engagement.** Since companies with high engagement are twice as profitable, it’s not surprising that Pricewaterhouse Coopers’ Global CEO Survey reported that 83 percent of executives list their talent management strategy as their top concern. I agree! I define engagement as

   *the unlocking of employee potential to drive high performance.* To help employees reach their potential, leaders must tap into their intrinsic motivational drivers and develop a job match that finds symbiosis between what an employee is great at, what they love to do, and what needs to get done.

3. **Performance.** We take keen interest in what is fair. Yet, fair is different from equal. Recently, a major Internet company announced plans to reward all of their employees (regardless of merit) with a 10 percent pay increase just because the company was doing well. Over time, such a decision erodes performance and creates disengagement. There is no incentive for employees to be high performers when mediocrity is rewarded in kind.

4. **Innovation.** Companies fail when they cease evolving their product or service, or internal processes. And yet many organizations (such as DEC or Polaroid) are slow to learn this lesson, leading their organizations for today rather than creating cultures of innovation and sustainability. Creating such cultures requires investing today’s cash to discover tomorrow’s technologies, products, services, geographies, and approaches. The mantra innovate or die has never been more prescient.

5. **Tri-branding.** The new media that’s taking the world by storm is a powerful tool for engagement, staffing, retention, and branding. Building sustainable cultures and business models with the valences that are now
part of everyday life requires tri-branding. This occurs when companies (such as Apple) build tenacious customer brand loyalty and passion that customers and employees then feel compelled to communicate. In a Creativeship culture, HR sets policies that facilitate employees’ use of social media since employees are the company’s best brand ambassadors.

6. Global growth. No industry is insulated from globalization. Technology is creating a level playing field regardless of where a product is produced or a service performed. To be sustainable, local companies need to think regional; regional companies need to think national; and national companies need to think global.

Realize that Leadership now means Creativeship and invest energy and resources in these six priorities.

Bob Kelleher is a consultant and author of Creativeship: A Novel for Evolving Leaders. Email rkelleher@employeeengagement.co