

Managing in a Competitive Environment

Good afternoon. Thank you for extending the invitation to present to you today. I am delighted to be among YOU – McGill's present and future leaders.

I cannot comment on the other speakers' presentations because unfortunately, I was not able to be present for them however, I am pleased to share my ideas and approach to leadership with you today to "educate," "empower," and "encourage" you to propel from being good managers to great leaders. I also realize that as the last presenter, I stand between you and the wine...

The manager's role is in a constant state of flux due to an ever-increasing number of internal and external influences occurring simultaneously. The world has become infinitely more complex, and the pace of change has accelerated at blinding speeds and shows no sign of relenting. The University, as a microcosm of the world, in which we live, mirrors this hectic pace. As leaders, we are continuously faced with the task of successfully managing change. Consider the reality of the manager's role at McGill today. The baby boomer generation has begun retiring, and that poses a myriad of challenges but more importantly, offers unparalleled opportunities for renewal.

In my presentation today I will outline the complexity of our present-day environment, I will then detail six simple strategies that will equip you with the

skills necessary to become excellent Managers and positively contribute to the University by supporting its mission. McGill's Professional Development Programs continue to expand in an effort to provide you with the tools necessary to enable you to satisfy your personal goals, inspire others, and become exceptional McGill ambassadors.

As I mentioned, there are numerous factors that attribute to our ever-changing and highly competitive society. Allow me to focus on three of these elements – technology, globalization, and accountability -- all of which impact us in ways we have yet to discover! If you were at the McGill, ten, five, or even three years ago, you can easily attest to the radical transformations that have been the direct results of these three elements.

Technology

Technology often plays a major role in the way we manage and process from the minutest of tasks to the most complex of systems. In fact, technology also influences the way we communicate and process the information that we receive from around the world. The rapid-fire maturation of the information age and the resulting onslaught of new technologies have been the conduits for sweeping changes on a global and consequently, local level. New technologies have also created the explosion of the knowledge revolution because information is figuratively and literally at our fingertips 24 hours per day, 365 days per year.

Globalization

Globalization has increased competition in every conceivable way. As a University, our programs, research, performance, efficacy, and general operations are no longer only scrutinized and compared to our immediate neighbours, but also to universities in the rest of Canada including our peer G-10 universities, in North America, including *American Association Universities* (AAU) and leading universities from around the world including the *Universitas 21* (U21) group of which we are a member.

Globalization has allowed students to become knowledgeable and savvy and they seek out the best universities; outstanding professors want to be affiliated with universities who are committed to high-quality teaching and research and their integration; and administrative and support staff want to work in institutions recognized for their high standards.

All of these realities have produced a climate where in people around the world endeavour to acquire the sparse sources of intellectual and human capital – the *only* strategic resources that can secure sustainable competitive advantage in the future of the university context.

So, how are we doing so far? Did you know that:

- ❖ According to CAUBO, McGill has the highest Endowment per Student ratio among all Canadian universities.
- ❖ According to Macleans Magazine, McGill, under-graduate students have the highest average grade for the Medical / Doctoral category?
- ❖ According to Macleans Magazine, McGill has the highest number of students who have won international awards in the Medical/Doctoral category?
- ❖ McGill has the highest rate of academic renewal anywhere in Canada?
- ❖ McGill's renewal rate in managerial staff far exceeds that of our academic renewal?
- ❖ McGill is the only Canadian university to appear in the top 50 in the world in all categories of the *Times Higher Education Supplement* annual rankings? and
- ❖ According to Research Infosource, McGill still continues to be the most research intensive University in Canada.

Accountability

Since Sheila Fraser, a McGill graduate, was appointed Auditor General of Canada, accountability and control systems have been driven to the forefront of every organization. Nortel and the Canadian Sponsorship Scandal are just two Canadian examples of breakdowns in governance and accountability that are radically changing the way we conduct business. The questionable ethics of those

involved in these scandals has created a volatile environment where everyone is subjected to vigilant and unforgiving scrutiny. Underestimating the importance of accountability is a great risk.

I have merely scratched the surface of what makes the world and subsequently McGill, the exciting but never-the-less intricately complex place it is today. How can we as leaders not just survive but thrive? How do we go from being good managers to great leaders?

I am going to discuss six strategies that will inevitably allow you to embrace change and personify the flexibility and adaptability required to stay one step ahead.

The Strategies

1. Leaders are Made - Not Born

Before introducing the other strategies, I have to assume that you already subscribe to the notion that leaders are made, not born. There is no genetic coding that guarantees the ability to lead and achieve greatness, only the desire and determination to achieve it. To borrow from Warren Bennis, distinguished Professor of Business Administration and founding Chairman of the Leadership Institute at the University of Southern California, “Leaders are not only made, they are self-made.”

2. Engage in Periodic Self-Reflection and Evaluation

Perhaps the most often neglected strategy in successful management is self-reflection and evaluation. On a consistent basis, evaluate the status quo and take an honest and in-depth look at yourself, the people you manage, and your department. Consider the vulnerabilities in yourself, your employees, and your department while simultaneously being alert and attuned to opportunities. Your self-reflection may even allow you to discover talents and abilities you never knew you had. It is also the perfect opportunity to decide the type of skills you will require of future employees so that their skill set compliments yours and enhances the overall team. While the University will work with you to provide as many resources as possible, you are solely responsible for your growth and development and this attentive consideration is the all-important first step.

The Competencies Model developed by the Human Resources Department should be the starting point of any professional self-reflection and evaluation as it pertains to McGill. These competencies are particularly valuable because they were developed at McGill, for McGill and 25% of the University's Managers or, one out of every four of you, played a role during the development stages of this important tool. As you evaluate yourself, your staff, and your Department, periodically select a few competencies that are relevant in the context of your

particular situation and take the necessary steps to develop them in yourself and your staff.

If your self-evaluation leads you to question the efficacy of a particular procedure or methodology, consider consulting McGill 2000+, the centrally funded service that was specifically developed to support continuous process improvement and promote quality methodology.

3. Commit to Learn and Develop New Skills

Periodic self-evaluation will enable you to be attuned to your own strengths and weaknesses so that you will be ready to focus on improving or acquiring skills. Be relentless in your pursuit of information. First and most importantly, learn from the achievements and vulnerabilities of your superiors, colleagues, and subordinates. Research, read, take courses, attend lectures and seminars, know and understand the world around you, invest in yourself. Don't wait for your ship to sail in, swim to it. As McGill and similar organizations become increasingly dynamic, and adaptive, managers at all levels must be more willing to engage in lifelong learning to develop skills that will enable them to keep pace with leading-edge thinking and practice. Social philosopher Eric Hoffer stated, "In times of change, learners inherit the earth; the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists."

McGill offers a wide variety of professional development courses in diverse areas that can help you and your colleagues develop new skills and refine existing ones. Whether it's a soft skill like effective customer service or a hard skill like writing, these courses will help you grow and increase your personal effectiveness. The Accounting Department has recently added a new curriculum to its Professional Development Program offering that detail the processes of vital accounting and finance functions. The new French modules offered at lunch give staff the opportunity to practice their language skills with colleagues. There is even a course to help you with your presentation skills. Take advantage of these courses – they were developed with you in mind; are taught from a McGill perspective; they offer a valuable opportunity to discuss issues with your colleagues, and are of no direct financial cost to you. When is the last time you looked on the Staff Development web site to review the latest course descriptions and schedule? Interestingly, after job postings, Staff Development is the most visited section on the Human Resources web site. In September 2005 alone, the section received more than 18, 000 hits! If you have any suggestions for seminar or course topics, please take the initiative and send them to Sophie Marcil whose role is to develop a Program that caters to the needs of the McGill community.

The need to effectively prepare and orient Managers with supervisory responsibilities became evident a year and a half ago and we responded with a custom-made Leadership Development Program. This Program is the result of exhaustive background work that included benchmarking studies, consultations with field experts and the senior administration, alignment with the existing Staff

Development Program and Competency Directory, congruence with best practices of leadership in the 21st century, and focus groups with Managers, Area Personnel Officers/Representatives, and Human Resources Managers – the potential future participant base. This integrated Program will offer comprehensive, practical, and meaningful training. With 18 full days of training over an 18 month period, the University is making a considerable investment in its leaders but we believe that helping supervisors develop management skills is necessary and vital in attracting and maintaining the best people and creating new generations of effective leaders. Had this Management forum conference been held earlier this year, I would have used the opportunity to introduce the Program however, the Program begun with its first group yesterday. While the first offering of the Program was initially targeted to train 12 people, three groups consisting of a total of 34 people have already registered and there is already a waiting list!

And there's so much more... To name a few: Have you taken advantage of the software courses? When is the last time you went to one of the University libraries? McGill employees have even more favourable borrowing privileges than students do – you can borrow 60 items at one time for a period of six weeks! When did you last review the class offerings in Continuing Education? Did you know that Toastmasters, a world-wide public speaking organization, has a club on campus? There are too many opportunities to name here. Take your life-long commitment to learning seriously and discover them all yourself!

4. Always Have a Vision

Think of your role as a manager as only the beginning and not simply a means to an end. Become an example of an effective leader who sets logical and attainable goals based on an overall mission or vision. This approach extends the idea of examining the status quo. Think about what can be modified to facilitate positive change, focus on it and work towards it. When you do this, ideas and processes don't stagnate – they advance. This is not only ideal in a competitive environment, it's essential. Share your vision with your colleagues and employees. John Quincy Adams, the 6th President of the United States, said, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."

Performance Dialogue can be helpful in determining your personal mission and by extension, that of your employees and the Department as a whole. Because it is a written exercise that is revisited after a certain period of time, the vision and objectives that are prompted are reviewed and measured and not simply forgotten. It's a good way to align your staff to work together to achieve common goals and share in a unified vision.

5. Be a Benevolent Leader

Character is arguably as important as knowledge. The modern and effective leader is not a dictator who works in isolation and enforces a unidirectional communication channel from themselves to their employees. The forward-thinking leader knows that being benevolent and humble are keys to successful and enduring leadership. Studies continue to prove that the most successful leaders who continually perform and lead their corporations and institutions to sustained excellence, also demonstrate both humility and professional determination. They channel their ambition to their organizations, create a new generation of leaders, accept responsibility for failures, and attribute successes to subordinates. They also exhibit an unwavering resolve to do everything necessary to generate the best long-term results and are the catalysts in the evolution from good to great.

6. Act Honestly and with Integrity

Recent scandals have highlighted the importance of ethics and corporate governance and accountability. I would argue that the vast majority of us know the difference between right and wrong and I believe that we all want to do the right thing. Doing the wrong thing is a choice and one that you have to face every day. If you are great leader in every way but succumb to greed and self-interest then you have failed. Don't be fooled by the hallowed possibilities that even the

slightest of discretions might promise. Winston Churchill stated it simple yet profound terms, “The price of greatness is responsibility.”

In a competitive world, ignorance is not a valid excuse either – especially in this volatile society where mistrust and the readiness to assign blame run rampant. It is for precisely these reasons that we have created the Administrative Responsibilities and Accountability Presentations. Using a checklist designed by Internal Audit as its centerpiece, the presentation outlines the accountabilities for which we are responsible. Over the last two years, it has been presented to more than two-thirds of the University’s Deans, Chairs, and Academic Directors. On November 17, approximately 40 level three and four managers will participate in a similar seminar. The presentations will continue to be held on a regular basis and will eventually include all Managers and Academic Administrators. You will all have the opportunity to attend one of these important sessions. It would be an irreparable shame if the University’s reputation was threatened and its integrity questioned because of an oversight or misunderstanding. Together, we can prevent that from happening by being well prepared.

Closing thought:

Now let me leave you with one little thought that I know could make a big difference for each of you both personally and professionally. “Seek to understand before trying to be understood” – Stephen Covey. Listen naively. Listen without trying to figure out what you are going to say next. Take a few

seconds to show your colleague, friend, partner, or family member that you have understood. Then you will be in a better position to add to the point or even to convince the other person of a different perspective. Through listening you build profound relations that will last a lifetime.

Conclusion

I hope that I have offered some insight into managing in a competitive environment and the strategies that I have presented will serve as important inputs as you continue to advance from good to great.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your attention.

Good luck and enjoy the wine and cheese!