

HOW TO REVEAL A COURAGEOUS CEO OF THE FUTURE

It is difficult to overstate the importance of selecting the right CEO.

Though board members are often very experienced, even they find it difficult to get CEO decisions and transitions right, reliably.

Three things explain a great deal of the variance in these situations. First, a great track record and fluency in business concepts are too often proxies for intelligence. Second, it is easy to overestimate the ability of a [new leader](#) to perform in an unfamiliar context. Third, assuming that past success is due to the decisions and actions of the leader, ignoring the effect of trends or just plain luck.

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Selecting leaders requires discernment

In addition to the reviewing past roles, accomplishments and so forth, it is vital to deliberately focus on characteristics that enable leaders to learn, act with integrity, and hold themselves accountable. Peter Drucker famously said that a manager's critical job is to manage themselves. Though one cannot directly see

the cognitive and emotional aspects of self-management, there are behavioral indicators that provide clues to important qualities that lie beneath the surface.

- Courage
- Character
- Competence
- Curiosity

Linda Yaccarino, Chairman, Advertising Sales and Client Partnerships at NBC Universal, embodies these, which explains not only her successful career, but why Business Week named her a "CEO of Tomorrow." Recently, she spoke at a VIP event for [OnBoard](#), an organization in Atlanta that advocates for increased presence of women in executive leadership roles and corporate boards. Her comments, insights and stories illuminated her character and inspired the audience.

Courage

Yaccarino described several experiences in her professional life that called upon her to be brave. Whether advocating for a strategic position, an individual or herself, she emphasized the need to take risks. Trepidation or not, her most important advice was to [take risks](#), but to prepare. Then, to proceed even if afraid.

Preparation is valuable for two reasons. First, it allows people to think through their ideas and positions. Second, preparation helps to shape a point of view or position to reflect the objectives

of others. How does a recommended course of action benefit customers, investors, employees, communities, and so forth? Once a potential benefit is articulated, it is much easier and more credible to advocate for it.

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Character

When asked how she developed the judgment to be a risk taker, but avoid disasters, Yaccarino's answer was surprisingly simple. She said that thinking about what is right and what isn't, helps to immediately clarify if something should be pursued, or not. While this seems simple and obvious, one needs to think for mere seconds of the many examples of leadership decisions that skipped this filter.

While a strong ethical core is essential, it needn't come wrapped in a dour countenance. Quite the contrary, when accompanied by a relaxed, self-effacing sense of humor, a leader is not only admirable but accessible.

Competence

Competence and high-standards for self and others is the factor that most feel most able to assess. Were that the case, fewer crises would be seen in organizations of all types.

In senior leadership roles, competence in one circumstance can lull a leader into believing they are capable in any situation. This is a dangerous, and often unconscious belief made worse by

an arrogant character. Arrogance meaning not merely a superior attitude but also a belief that one has nothing to learn.

Curiosity

Interest in other people, new places, experiences and points of view is not easy to convey when one is onstage. Yaccarino conveys curiosity in a natural way and allows others to see not only what she has learned and is learning about the fast-paced business in which she works, but also what she has learned about herself. When leaders learn in public, it says to everyone that it is not only ok to ask questions, seek advice, and admit not knowing, it is preferable.

Innovation is what most every company seeks, yet often leaders do things that prevent it, including quashing curiosity. To inspire innovation, leaders need to not only say that exploration is desirable, they need to celebrate it.

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The Reveal

The leadership needs of organizations are too significant to be filled only by those who fit a narrow prototype, but traditions of searching and selection are easier to follow than alter. Revealing talent takes effort, time, and most of all, deliberately altering both the criteria and the methods for deciding how closely a person fits it.

Senior leaders won't reveal the hidden talent in their organizations or see the possibilities for the talent they do recognize until they first accept the possibility that their efforts will reveal extraordinary people.