



Scott Finders' Leadership Lessons

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In this series, we explore some of the most important lessons and insights from our executive coaches and mentors.

Scott Finder, an executive coach and mentor at The ExCo Group, former Managing Director at BlackRock, and former Chief Digital Officer at First Republic Bank, shares his key lessons—emphasizing the importance of building friendships at all levels, leveraging the power of your network, and embracing the mindset of ‘do less, do better.’”.

KEY LEADERSHIP LESSONS

The first one is: do less, do better. I’ve learned that most things that cross your desk as a leader are not the best use of your time to focus on and should be ignored or delegated. It’s your job to find the 5 to 10 percent of the activity and topics that cross your desk that really deserve your focus. It can be easy and tempting to chase everything. But you will lose perspective if you do that, and it really waters down your impact.

I learned this when I was new to a role in my thirties. I had been managing a team of about 50 people, and suddenly, I was managing a team of about 300 people. That six-fold increase in people and responsibilities felt massive to me. The number of issues and people coming into my office with prob-

lems was a bit overwhelming. I was working crazy hours, and the problems were piling up. I was also starting to allocate budget toward a lot of things, much of which provided only incremental value.

During an annual budget review, I realized that I had trouble rationalizing those decisions, even to myself. I had been looking at too many things at a surface level. I had to course correct and focus more on where I wanted to spend my time, what could be delegated, and what could be ignored. I learned that an hour of planning time, reflection time, thinking about strategy, or simply spending 1:1 time with my direct reports was far more valuable than most of the meetings that I sat in on. Back-to-back meetings all day, every day, is a risky recipe for effectiveness, no matter how common it is. I learned to ask myself a simple question at the end of every day: Where can I have the most impact?

Another big lesson was that people don't remember what you did; they remember how you made them feel about themselves. I learned this when I moved into a new high-visibility role in a new company. The CEO said to me, "Scott, take 30 days. Do a tour, talk to lots of people, get input, get them excited that change is coming, and then decide what needs to be done and just do it." That was empowering, and there was an expectation that I was going to drive a lot of change. Unfortunately,

"Do less, do better."

I misread the company culture a bit, because I was overly focused on the fact that I had the CEO's support. So during my conversations with people throughout the company, I was distracted. I was in a new role. I was busy. In retrospect, I wasn't listening as well as I should have been in those meetings.

Fast forward, and some challenges started coming up, particularly with support from stakeholders. Some of the people I had met with were quite passive, and this was at a time when I needed their support and excitement to help build momentum for change. But things were just not moving that quickly, and it was confusing and at times painful. So I stepped back and sought out counsel from someone who had been there for decades. Between that and just reflecting on what had happened, I realized that I had not shown enough genuine interest in people and what they had to say. When you treat people like they're just a box to check on your list, they feel that. I needed to basically start over and re-climb the mountain, this time actually valuing their intelligence, their experience, and really learning from them.

This drives whether people want to work with you. You have to build that foundation of trust. It changed everything for me. I realized that it's great to have the CEOs' backing, but you need friends at all levels, in all areas. Spending a lot of time on relationship building can feel slower upfront, but over time, you actually move a lot faster (and do better work!) because you've got the power of the network behind you.

WHEN I COACH CLIENTS, WE OFTEN TALK ABOUT...

One of the dangers, particularly when you're successful, is that it's easy to stop being truly curious. You get promoted into bigger roles, and you can start to think, I'm good, I'm fully baked. I know I can get stuff done, and the results prove it. Over time, we can get overly focused on what's directly in front of us, and we sort of turn off our learning and curiosity muscle. We can lose the view of the horizon that we're supposed to be driving toward and focus instead on the wrong things, or we know the hori-

zon but we lose track of the best ways to get there. We start to get out of sync with the company we work within and what really works there. Even if you're off by just 1 percent, you will end up in a really different place over time.

So just a drop of ongoing and healthy paranoia of what you might be missing as a leader can be really valuable. So I will often talk with my clients about, Where are you headed? How's the journey going? How connected are you to the view of others? Are you clear about what's really at stake in your work? Why does the work you're doing matter to the company? Is the approach working? Are you making the progress you want to make? Are you aligned with the person you report to? Are you aligned with your peers? Once people start engaging on those questions, the lightbulbs start to come on, and you can begin to unwind the stories they might be telling themselves that need to be re-examined.

Another big theme, which is almost the opposite of what I just described, is that it's very common for people to see themselves narrowly and lose sight of how much they're actually capable of. People don't necessarily like change—we like the safety and certainty of “wash, rinse, and repeat.” When faced with perceived constraints in how we do our jobs, or what we are empowered to get involved in solving, we often think “that is outside my boundaries or my skillset.” We like to rely on what has made us successful in the past. We forget that we can keep growing and that our abilities can be applied much more broadly. Mindset is key. The problem is that it's like falling asleep at the wheel. We don't realize we have boxed in our own thinking. So it's about helping people to step back and realize that they are not limited by the particular role they are in at the time or self-determined constraints, and instead help them broaden their horizons and often ultimately take new action.