

What's Keeping CEOs Up at Night? Six Facts That Will Surprise You

By Chris Wells; April 8, 2014

Many CEOs lead public lives and relish the spotlight. But behind the scenes, CEOs experience frustration and anxiety like the rest of us, and aren't always totally confident in their teams' ability to deliver on their promises.

Do you ever wonder what keeps CEOs awake at night? So did we here at Kapta. So we set out to interview over 300 chief executives to find out what was on their mind.

Besides the standard concerns about sales numbers, profitability and market position, here are some surprising facts about the major frustrations of CEOs.

Top Concerns of CEOs:

Surprises: 38% of CEOs interviewed have been blind-sided by a negative surprise in the last 90 days. You would think that CEOs have total visibility into what's going on in their company – but think again. CEOs want to know all the important things that are going on in their company so really dislike secrets and surprises (both good and bad).

Not enough data: 71% of the CEOs we spoke with feel frustrated about lack of meaningful data in their organization. With all the business intelligence dashboards and analytics software on the market, you would imagine that CEOs have all the data they need at their fingertips. It turns out they don't – and that's a major point of frustration.

Performance of the top team: 45% of the CEOs were not satisfied with their executive team's performance. They also weren't sure that every member of the executive team was fully on-board with the company's strategic plan. Almost every CEO says "We only hire A players" – but do they really believe it?

Moving too slow: 82% of CEOs feel like their team isn't acting with enough urgency and this was affecting the company's ability to get things done. Not being nimble and quick can sink a company. The CEOs we talked to feel like they are always hustling, so why can't the others keep up?

Lack of Control: 64% of CEOs said they don't have full control over their company's direction. CEOs want to be in control but know that organizations are complex entities with lots of moving parts. Most CEOs don't want a strict "command and control" organization but they do want to feel like they are steering the ship.

Employees don't get it: Only 22% of CEOs have confidence that their employees "get it." CEOs often fear that employees are working on unproductive or misdirected activities that are unrelated to the company's strategy. CEOs know that to achieve long-term success the whole company has to be aligned behind their strategy – but today there's a major gap here.

So what to do?

Of course the easy retort here is to blame the CEOs themselves. I personally believe this might be too simplistic a standpoint. For sure CEOs should ask exactly how they are responsible and look for strong solutions, but maybe the issue is deeper. Could the real root of the problem be the archaic Management practices, hierarchies and structures that still govern many of our businesses today? Is it time to look toward new models of business management? Certainly there is no easy fix. What do you think?

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