
LEADERSHIP MEANS PRACTICING the **Art of Adaption**

By Tay Yoshitani | CEO Port of Seattle

What are the most important things a leader can do to help get his or her organization, and the economy, to a place of greater stability?

“Leaders must understand not only where the market is headed, but what it takes to be competitive in that new market – which may mean making significant changes so that you adapt. There’s an art to that, and to bringing all stakeholders together in difficult or turbulent times. It’s imperative that leaders motivate everyone so that they’re all moving in the same direction.”

What’s the best leadership style in an uncertain economy?

“I don’t know that a leader’s style changes in response to an uncertain economy; but in those times, you are typically faced with limited resources – financial, staff, and time. Those limitations mean you must remain exceptionally focused. In normal economic times, you have more latitude to experiment. You don’t have that luxury when times are uncertain – you have to exercise laser-like focus.”

How does leadership influence culture and strategy in a tough marketplace?

“It’s easy for everyone in an institution to become discouraged in difficult times.

The leader has a responsibility to model an upbeat outlook, to show that he or she believes that the organization can, and will, weather the storm.

A leader must also face reality: When staff members are discouraged, or events are going the wrong way, leadership means showing the path forward and maintaining a positive atmosphere that motivates everyone to move through the difficulty.”

Can you name a leader – either someone in your industry, or someone you’ve worked for or collaborated with – who has helped his or her organization survive and thrive in the current economy?

“I have been very impressed with the leadership of Alaska Airlines in recent years. The economic downturn hit the airline industry hard, yet Alaska continues to thrive. When you compare their performance with the trends in air travel – they have managed the organization very well, and are now poised to take advantage of economic recovery.”

About Tay Yoshitani

Tay Yoshitani joined the Port of Seattle as its CEO in March 2007. He carries out policies set by the Port Commission and leads the Port’s operating divisions, including the sixth largest container port in the nation, and Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, which welcomed more than 32.8 million passengers in 2011. When he took the helm, Yoshitani set about ensuring that the organization’s commitment to sustainability rivaled its success as an economic engine. A U.S. Army veteran, Yoshitani has a Bachelor of Science degree from the United States Military Academy at West Point, and earned his MBA at Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration. He serves on the National Center for APEC Board and on the boards of a number of local Seattle civic and trade-related organizations.

