

Leadership Means Targeting High-Relevance Strategies

By John R. Boyle



The best and the brightest leaders in the country were interviewed about their personal viewpoints on the concept of leadership in uncertain times. In this second interview in the series, *Leadership in Uncertain Times*, John Boyle speaks with Steve McConnell, Managing Partner of NBBJ, who explains why targeting high-relevance strategies really matters.

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?

Strategies that target high relevance within your sector. You need to have perspective both inside and outside your business to help define clear targets. This leads to smart strategies that are specific to the enterprise. I also believe in a commitment to action to generate forward momentum. One key is to embrace incremental steps that lead to a big goal. This helps keep the focus on the journey – not simply the destination. Finally, it's important to cultivate confidence within yourself and for all you work with to inspire and settle the team.

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

There are lots of effective styles. Yet they should be enabling in order to succeed and generate leverage. I agree with the adage that fear is the enemy – and danger is all around us in an uncertain economy. Leaders need to demonstrate a steady hand. It's easy to worry and lose focus in a bad economy. Grip the wheel gently. If you're too tight, you'll lock up your organization.

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

Leadership impacts culture and strategy at the highest level. It can validate or invalidate culture and strategy. If leaders aren't leading, then vision clarity will be lost and culture will erode which leads to confusion and inefficiency. Leaders should be self-aware and realize they're being watched. Everyone in the organization is looking for clues and assessing your sensibilities. So, in my view, strategy should be informed by one's confidence in the organization's ability to execute and create value. Finally, you have to be willing to say 'no' to things that don't align with the journey to success that is informed by your strategy.

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?

Dan Ivanoff is a remarkable individual, in my opinion. He represents a story of visionary leadership, out smarting the competition, calculated risk-taking, and success over the last 10 years. When you look at the most recent real-estate cycle, he's had a big impact. To achieve this track record, he orchestrated insightful primary research to guide his strategy. Then there was courage and conviction that sustained smart execution on that strategy.

Steve McConnell, FAIA, is a managing partner at the global design firm NBBJ. His work includes bringing Reebok's brand to life in its world headquarters, greening the United States Federal Courthouse in Seattle and exploring how "local roots" and "global reach" come together for the new Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation headquarters. The common thread in his work is design solutions that help clients inspire their workforce, build their brand, and discover new value within a given market. Founded in 1943, NBBJ has nine offices worldwide—in Beijing, Boston, Columbus, London, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Seattle, and Shanghai.