

# An easy road seldom

Efforts to become a Chief Executive Officer can be as challenging and draining as the

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A CEO's job is a much coveted one. Two decades ago, when I entered the talent-search industry, virtually every candidate I met wanted to be a Chief Executive Officer. It seemed to be everyone's ultimate dream, and I remember a number of candidates taking inputs on how to get to the corner room in a hurry. They saw the job to be one where they enjoyed great perks and recognition with limited downside.

Though coveted still, the CEO's job has today lost some of its sheen. There are candidates today who think the job of a CEO is thankless and therefore not worth aspiring for. However, if you are really keen on leaving a legacy or looking at creating maximum impact, then the job of a CEO is something you should strive for. Here's how you can prepare yourself for this job.

## Go the extra mile

Strategise and strive to get as diverse an experience as possible. Try to get cross-functional, cross-industry and diverse-geographical exposure. It is good to volunteer and take additional responsibilities in the organisation as doing so will pay rich dividends later. Cultivate relationships with other functional heads and try to understand their challenges and learn from their experience. In a word, be hungry to learn not only about your job but also focus on the big picture from an organisational standpoint.

## Learn and unlearn

You must first introspect and get feedback from others on a regular basis, as this will help

you carry out course corrections, whenever necessary. You have to ensure you have quality thinking time as this alone will help you realise that some of your decisions and actions were suboptimal. As the speed and magnitude of change is increasing by the day, the shelf life of our ideas as well strategies is decreasing – a CEO aspirant should know this. Unlearning outdated ideas and perspectives is therefore important as potential employers will look at tomorrow and your perspectives on that.

## Get a mentor

Having a great mentor can be life-changing for you. Frankly,

everyone at the senior level in an organisation needs one. It can only add value to your strategic career/ life decisions. It helps if the coach/ mentor understands your eco system and enables you to see the big picture more clearly. In my experience, corporate life today is like running on a treadmill with very little time to pause and ask yourself the bigger questions.

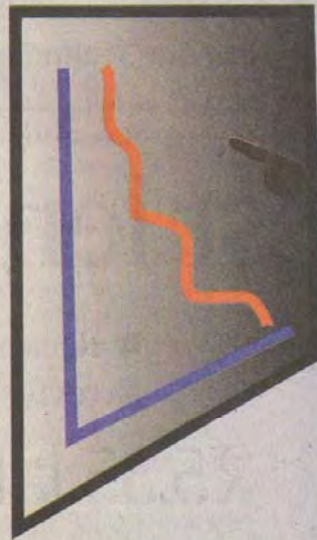
So, it is important that all professionals have a mentor who will ask these questions for them. They have to invest time with their mentor on a bi-monthly or at least quarterly basis. It helps if the mentor has been a CEO himself. For, he will help you

transition to the role faster.

What are the things to look for, while hiring a CEO?

Everyone looks at competencies, relevance of experience, track record and cultural fitment. We also look closely at educational qualifications. However, these alone unfortunately never determine success of the candidate at the job. Remember, this hire can make or break your organisation, so you do need to tread warily and look far beyond the obvious. The following characteristics may be more important than we imagine.

They are so simplistic that we sometimes do not give adequate importance to them or



# leads to the top job

the position itself



take them for granted.

## Passion

The job of a CEO will take a lot out of any human being. Therefore, it is critical that we hire a CEO who is passionate about the industry as well as the objectives, vision and mission of the organisation. Being passionate about the job, one is impelled to go the extra mile to garner success. After all, fairly often success comes when one just does not give up and simply perseveres. An extra effort sometimes is the difference between success and failure.

## Compatibility

Hiring a CEO or for that mat-

ter anyone is akin to choosing a life partner.

There is nothing right or wrong about people as they have their strengths and weaknesses. It is more about compatibility of two individuals.

Here, it is all about the compatibility of the candidate with the values of the organisation as well as the personal chemistry with key stakeholders.

If there is compatibility, the chance of the journey being pleasant is higher.

Mismatch between the principles of the organisation and the mental make-up of the candidate will lead to problems sooner or later.

Also, this is one of the reasons for an "early divorce" which frankly is painful for both the organisation as well as the candidate.

## Emotional quotient

High emotional quotient is both an imperative and an asset.

When one is humble, the learning ability is higher as one accepts feedback more readily and also course-corrects.

## Eye on the future

Every business today is at risk for disruption and therefore, it becomes important that a CEO has a perspective about the changes in the business

eco system as the customer expectations, needs and demands tend to change fast. The CEO has to be obsessed with creating an eco system that looks at future needs today.

Employees aspiring for a CEO's job should give themselves five years to prepare for it. In the corporate world, your first innings will show to stakeholders whether you are a CEO material or not.

From the standpoint of hirers, invest sufficient time and engage at least twice with the candidates as nothing less than hiring the best person for this coveted job will do.

*(Ronesh Puri is Managing Director at Executive Access.)*