



## **Reflections from a CEO**

The role of being a CEO sounds glamorous and even fun. The role can be fun, but after more than 10 years in the role of CEO, I can tell you it is anything but glamorous. We are the first to report to work every day and the last to leave. Well, we may come in later and leave the office earlier than others, but I can assure we start work before 6:00 am most days and are lucky to finish before 8:00 pm.

The other day, I came home physically exhausted, dirty, and ready for a nap, but a day's worth of emails awaited me. As I made myself some tea, and settled into my office chair, I heard my daughter ask my husband why I was tired. Sadly, my daughter has grown accustomed to my work habits, and has learned to work around them. I have always had a corner dedicated to her, and she has spent more of her life playing quietly or doing work with me, than experiencing the normal relationship of a mother and daughter. My husband responded to her, "Mom got her hands dirty today. She loves that. All great leaders get dirty regularly." In my haste to get emails responded to so I could just be mom, I barely heard what he said. It was later that I reflected on this statement and realized the power of what he had said.

All great leaders should get dirty regularly. Not the illegal, immoral, or unethical dirty, but actually dirty. Being a CEO means we know how to do all the jobs in our organization, maybe not well, but we can fill in in a snap, and we step in to support staff as needed. We jump start buses needed for programming so our staff can focus on their preparations. We learn how to do minor plumbing repairs and keep waders in the closet so we can deal with the overflowing toilet on the way to the board meeting. We crawl through ceilings with HVAC repairmen to see the problem for ourselves and to assist with problem solving. We learn to unload 1,500 cans of food, twice without breaking a sweat, because sweat and meetings don't mix.

Great leaders should be on the front lines every day. Not for praise or to be seen, but to provide the support and assistance our staff need. Our job is to empower our staff to complete their jobs the best they possibly can. Our job is to take the hit when something fails, to get the butt chewing from the board, to make the difficult decisions which keep us up all night, and then show up the next day ready for battle.

We are not CEOs with corner offices, we are the platoon leaders crawling through the trenches with our staff. We are scared to death every minute of every day, but we dare not allow our fear to show, because our staff relies on us to set the tone. We always have an answer or solution to the problem, even when we don't understand one word of the issue. We are never too clean or pristine to roll up our sleeves and jump into the mud pit, knowing we have a HUGE meeting in an hour, have not had time to prepare, but have the skills to make it up as we go along while flying by the seat of our pants.



I love my job, most days. I love the excitement and challenges. I love being pushed to learn new things quickly. But I will always remember to get my hands dirty, to stay grounded and remember where I came from.