

# CEO <sup>20</sup> CEO

Assisting business leaders as they navigate critical passages

## Are You on the Right Course?

August, 2008



Just last week at an Association for Corporate Growth SF luncheon (I'm a member) we heard a fabulous speaker (a pro, [www.paulkingsman.com](http://www.paulkingsman.com)) who is an Olympic medalist swimmer. He reminded us all how critical practice is, and even then, sometimes you just barely win — in his case, the bronze by 4/100ths of a second. Most of my clients and I are continually amazed at how hard it is to be a great CEO. *So we practice a lot.* Here are a few of my practice notes.

### Flushing out a green team.

A client put together a top level business plan and tasked some of his new leaders to put together two supporting one page plans. But the two executives wouldn't get to the finish line. The CEO ultimately concluded that they weren't really ready. The planning process flushed that out.

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## The INSOMNIA Factor

What keeps CEOs **AWAKE AT NIGHT**  
—and what to do about it.

### Are you on the right course?

By Robert Sher

Are you on the right course?

What do I mean? I could mean all of the answers -- are you focusing on the right things at the office this week? Is your plan to deal with your current headache right? Or I could mean your company strategy, or your three-year company plan, or even your career choice. Being on the right course is one of those things that can keep us CEOs awake at night.

I thought about that a lot while on vacation in Italy for two weeks at the end of June with my wife and two children. I went cold turkey from e-mail and cell phone, and didn't check it at all for 12 days.



Ben, Jessica and I in front of the Coliseum in Rome.

### The Plan that Killed the Business.

Setting down a business plan in writing doesn't mean you'll hit it. One client with three business units saw the smallest miss its targets by a wide margin for three months running. The CEO concluded that the human assets at work in that business unit would be more productive working in his two large business units, and shut the small unit down. This is always sad, but much better than letting it run, uncertain of how well it is doing for another six months, then shutting it down. Business

planning, and the regular measurement of results vs. plan makes us stare reality in the face, and encourages us to take swift action.

### Time to Sell?

I had a few conversations with a client thinking about selling his business. We roughed out some numbers to get an idea of what the business could fetch, then designed a self-selling strategy where he could reach out to some of his

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## *The Insomnia Factor, continued*

In Rome, I saw the busts of great emperors and popes who were incredibly powerful and important in their day, but now, thousands of years later they were just another statue, unknown but for the name placard. Their homes have long since crumbled except for a few, who are crumbling. Yet in the days before I left for vacation, my e-mails and projects seemed so important. But in a thousand years, or even in five years, what would they really mean? So why did I need to be so wound up about it all?

I was reading Dune again, and a few of the Asimov Foundation novels, which talk about the future of the human race in spans of thousands of years, and kings and rulers flitting in and out of existence. What a contrast to the daily business details we all sweat over. Admittedly, it is fiction, but still, the time off and my experience during that time was giving me perspective over my day to day work.

I forgot which jet lagged night during which I was awake that I asked myself if in the annals of history what I do in my day to day life would ever be remembered, or have any lasting impact?

That's when I knew I was thinking about this way too deeply. A sculpture of my head will not likely ever be a tourist attraction, but it did focus my mind on what aspects of what I do really make the biggest difference for the people around me in my lifetime. That includes my wife and kids, my friends, my clients, and their employees.

I'm going to try and unplug more often in the future. I think it's a real issue for CEOs to find ways to be able to escape the day to day rhythm of business so that they can mentally and emotionally get to higher ground, to view their businesses and lives from the broadest perspective possible and to re-affirm their course, or to decide upon changes.

I just finished talking to a CEO who sold her business and has taken a year off to settle and figure her new direction. That's great, but I have to wonder if all of us should do a mini-version of that every year.

I wish it would work to be able to shift our perspectives during a workout, or a massage or something, but I think it takes days, or weeks at least, to really get the job done. However you can, try and take the time to go deep within and answer the question: Am I on the right course? Then make the course correction as needed.

trusted industry connections to gently check for interest, or to see if his connections knew of those that might be interested. And he got a nibble, then a negotiation! Time will only tell the outcome-- this work takes time.

### **My Network of Experts**

A client wants to make a promotional video. I connected him with a top filmmaker and am helping coordinate some of the details. For another client, I referred a search engine optimization expert to clean up the code on their site, then the next step will be to start attracting the search engines.

### **Executive State of Mind**

Increasingly I've been hammering into several client top teams that we are *executives*, not just managers. It seems to connote a well prepared, well disciplined, focused leader. I'm having some one on one conversation with some of those executives about how to better be a executive.

### **The Other Way to Build Sales**

One client builds sales by relationship building with intermediaries and the other through paid online ads -- both have me assisting in figuring out and executing an outbound sales and marketing machine so that there will be two engines for sales.

### **Leading Discussions**

The Alliance of Chief Executives had a CEO round table about growing through acquisitions, and I was one of the discussion leaders. St. Mary's College had an event with their executive international MBA program in June and I was asked to speak

*Please call, e-mail or let's get together.*

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