

Creating Confident Organizations

A CEO to CEO Quarterly Newsletter



FROM THE DESK OF BOB WILSON

Transition

Dear Fellow CEO:

Many of these letters over the last eight years have touched on one aspect or another of strategic planning. This fact reflects the important role the strategic planning process plays within our own business and the vital role we believe it could / should have within yours. Having a plan that all employees understand and are aligned with is a strong foundation for business success. It helps build a confident organization by providing the sustenance and guidance for all times, but is especially necessary in the tough economic times in which we currently find ourselves.

We completed the last 5-year iteration of our plan in April of 2007. Looking back, we've accomplished some of the goals we set for ourselves and still have others that need to be fulfilled. One of the goals that we set two years ago was to develop a succession plan for the business by 2010. After much thought and a fair amount of work, that plan is now in place. This note is offered to help explain the process that got us to where we are as well as to describe where we hope to go.

Let me start out by saying I really don't have an intention to retire or step away from the business in the near term. I'm 57 years old, reasonably healthy and enjoy what I do within ADVISA and what we do as a company. I can't envision myself not coming to work in the morning and it's my guess that there will always be work that I'm able and willing to do within our organization so long as I can continue to make it through the doors.

The challenge is that I'm also of an age where, as much as one doesn't like to think about these things, it's becoming more possible something bad could happen to me. And with 15 other people dependent upon the success of the business, it's important to me that I not stand in the way of its successful future. The business was built to outlast me, and for the last 15 or so years all of the people within it have helped to create a pretty nice little enterprise. We all want ADVISA positioned to last well into the future – ideally, with me in it. But, at some point, it will have to be in position to thrive without me too. So, it was obvious we needed a succession plan.

The biggest question to be answered by any leader at the starting point of a business transition is, "Who is best able to continue the direction of the business after I leave it?" In our business, it's particularly complicated because we have so many former and potential CEO's who operate as consultants within it. Every consultant in our organization could make a very good case for their selection as my successor. Who should it be? Who is best positioned to be a leader of all of our leaders?

There really was only one possible choice: Heather Haas.

Here's why. She is now about the same age I was when I started the business. Her profile is similar to mine and, more importantly, her way of thinking and approaching problems is aligned with mine. She's a tireless worker who recognizes the importance of the customer to our success; the necessity of having team-oriented motivated employees to deliver customer satisfaction; and the sanctity of her family that's necessary to assure that she's able to have the balance to perform both of the previous duties with a solid grounding from a position of personal happiness. She's proactive, headstrong and willing to take me on even when I know am right; and in those cases, has the wherewithal to push on to convince me I'm wrong (those few times when I am). She gets along with people better than me, sells better, connects faster and bridges personal issues more easily. Obviously, I think she is and will be terrific.

How did her role evolve? Once she proved her mettle as a trainer, consultant and program developer, I began to rely on her in the process of idea development and clarification. She'd see things I sometimes didn't see, play devil's advocate, or just say, "That looks good. Let's do it!" In any case, as time went on, we started functioning as management partners – subbing for each other in our areas of responsibility and handling the tougher problems as a team.

Our team has grown used to Heather's role as I have. Because she is so good at getting issues out on the table, she became the mediator between people to solve and / or diminish personal issues. Over time, the team has begun to bring ideas to her as often as they do to me. I think the transition seems natural to us all.

Heather's young (from my vantage point) and while she's mature beyond her years, we both hope that we'll have the opportunity to work together to build on her business knowledge over the next several years. And if everything goes according to plan, there will be plenty of time to give her the experience necessary to fully take control of the business. The plan is as follows.

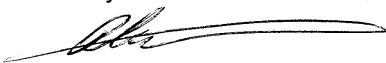
As of the first of January 2009, Heather assumed the role of COO. We'll continue to work as a team, but this gives her direct responsibility for four of our consultants. Additionally, whenever the opportunity presents itself, I pass decisions on to Heather for her to make. Sometimes, she just makes them on her own without my involvement. She's taken a bigger role in our interactions with PIWW (the licensor for Predictive Index®) and has as many tasks on her plate as I do in our overall leadership of the business.

We'll continue in this fashion with Heather taking increasing responsibility and me pulling back until the end of 2011 when I'll move into the role of Chairman and Heather will become President and CEO.

As each day passes, I'm more convinced that I've made the right decision and that the fate of the business is progressing into the proper hands. Our team, as you all know, is tremendously talented and orchestrating their interdependent and independent actions requires a skill that I'm still working on acquiring. I think by the time Heather moves into my chair, she'll be better at it than I ever was. And I think that should be of benefit to all of you – our clients. And thus, ultimately, it should be of benefit to the long-term health of the business – which is what we were trying to accomplish in the process.

Thank you for reading.

Sincerely



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