

A psychotherapist with over 34 years of experience, Robin Zarel works with employees, supervisors and senior management to resolve personal and work-related problems. Her writings under *Mind Over Matter* are featured blog in *Psychology Today*. In an interview, she emphasises that corporate leaders should trust their guts for making correct decisions and listen to their inner voice`

TRUST GUT FEELING

PTA News Bureau

The feelings of fear, anger, and embarrassment about how a decision will be perceived can impact decision-making by corporate leaders, says a renowned psychotherapist Robin Zarel.

CEOs are constantly faced with making financial, business and personnel decisions every single day; sometimes under a great deal of stress with multiple demands placed on them. They are walking the tight-rope.

“Being self-aware is a key ingredient in the success of the leader as well as the organisation,” says Zarel, who has been a psychotherapist with over 34 years of experience treating

individuals and couples in her midtown Manhattan private practice and advising corporate decision-makers and employees on issues of managing life and organisations.

“People usually in their gut know the right thing to do, the correct decision to make, but uncomfortable, sometimes unconscious feelings or issues, get in the way of doing that,” she told **Polymers & Tyre Asia** in an interview.

“These may include feelings of fear, anger, and embarrassment about how they will be perceived which can impact decision-making,” she pointed out.

For corporate leaders, the ability to be fully conscious of what they are feeling,



Robin Zarel

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to trust that inner voice and be able to distinguish what it is saying is an imperative tool. Additionally, being able to distinguish what may be interfering with this ability such as time and monetary pressures, concerns about the impact of certain decisions and how they as a leader will be viewed is also essential.

In her highly popular blog *Mind Over Matter* appearing in *Psychology Today* magazine, she emphasises the fact that managers should trust their guts.

"We all come into our jobs and careers with a personal history which can impact our ability to "tune into our gut," she explained.

Add to that the specific pressures that managers and leaders face – having to answer to stockholders, and time pressures, which then might cause a manager to make expedient, but short-sighted decisions.

Sometimes it takes time to substantiate or qualify what we might feel to be true, and perhaps we don't have the facts yet to back it up, and pressures from outside sources make us take the easy way out.

Gut feeling

"Ignoring their gut in this instance, and wanting to please someone – a Board of Directors, stockholders, employees, or consumers, might seem easier in the short run, but usually causes problems later on," Zarel cautions.

Factors including the internal security of the manager, the power and position that they hold in the organisation, might affect their ability to "trust their gut".

There is always a need to ask the tough questions – if something hasn't worked, it is imperative to do an honest assessment breaking down very specifically the problems and choices made, to avoid it ever happening again.

"Rationalising foolish choices or what might be wrong with the decision-making process denies corporate leaders the opportunity to really dissect the problem and come up with alternative actions for more successful outcomes in the future," she says.

Although it might make someone feel better in the short term, it then becomes more about the ego of the leader(s), trying to save face, not acknowledge mistakes and less about the good of the company.

A secondary problem of this defensive posture is that it decreases credibility of the leader, because those around them

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usually know the truth. Then, respect for leadership dwindles and future decisions might hold less credence.

"Ultimately, the bottom line is about making the business prosper, to have high productivity and good employee morale which should be incentive enough to honestly evaluate past difficulties," she said.

Losing focus

When asked how in a hyper-competitive world of business a CEO can develop an attitude that pays attention to his inner thoughts and feelings in evolving successful corporate policies, Zarel has this to say: "The fact that someone has achieved CEO status already shows an ability to be tuned into thoughts and feelings to reach certain goals. Developing successful corporate policies just expands on this ability."

However, sometimes pressures from

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outside or inside the organisation cause the CEO to lose focus and interfere with this skill of reading their internal compass. The result can be the devaluing of one of the strengths that made them successful in the first place and cause short-sighted policy decisions.

"Recognising when and if these pressures are occurring, and how they may be impacting decisions that are being made is crucial," Zarel reminds CEOs.

Remembering and tuning into the skills they already have, past successes when these have been used wisely and successfully, can also be a helpful reminder about the importance of the need to pay attention to inner thoughts and feelings.

Also, the need to spend time relaxing away from the work environment to recharge your battery, so to speak, – to get some distance from the pressures that are always present, is a way to not be on "overload".

"In my experience working with some top level, highly successful, competitive corporate executives, this is often one of the hardest things to do, but once they do it, they are much happier and their businesses thrive," she said.

Internal cues

But today's CEOs have a great challenge to face because they are often working in a multicultural environment in a globalised business environment.

When asked how such CEOs can make choices consciously to create sustainable corporate bottom lines, Zarel emphasises the need to find internal cues.

"Awareness of internal cues they are experiencing, deciphering what may be impacting them, as well as the impact of acting on them are first steps towards creating a sustainable bottom line," she explained.

"Being able to ask questions and recognising what we don't know, especially about other cultures where we might have business ventures are essential."

Making conscious choices means being aware of what you are experiencing on an emotional, physical, intellectual, business and interpersonal level. "Recognising what might be interfering with the ability to do this increase a CEO's ability to address whatever problems there might be and to find a solution to deal with them." To be a successful CEO trust your gut. ▲