

CHIEF, EXECUTIVE, OFFICER

BUSINESS LEADERS DISSECT THEIR JOBS

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To successfully manage a growing company through a recession and changes in technology requires a strategic vision and strong leadership.

Often CEOs get caught up in the day-to-day functions of their companies, but what drives growth is when they cultivate a strong workforce and think strategically.

At a CEO Evolution panel attended by 200 Jan. 29 at UConn Stamford, four Fairfield County CEOs discussed their management styles, how to drive employee productivity and how to monitor growth.

Speakers included Linda McMahon, former CEO of World Wrestling Entertainment; Austin McChord, CEO of Datto Inc.; Paul Senecal, CEO of Affineco L.L.C.; and Dr. John Votto, CEO of the Hospital for Special Care.

The event was hosted by the UConn School of Business and regional accounting, tax and consulting firm Citrin Cooperman. The Business Journals served as media sponsor and Stamford-based consulting firm CBP was sponsor.

When McMahon and her husband Vince first started WWE, McMahon said the two managed everything while sharing the same desk.

“When you’re first starting out you have to concentrate on the everyday,” McMahon said.

But later as the company turned into a 700-person, global enterprise, McMahon said it was her mission to hire people “smarter” and “better” at managing the various departments than she was. That way, she had time to think about new initiatives and pour over data reports.

Admitting she can be controlling, McMahon said she preferred the weekly reports to monthly ones.

“When you have great executives you can focus on trouble spots,” McMahon said. “See what needs focus and what’s next.”

“When everything is moving smoothly, you go to the Bahamas,” she said with a laugh. “Though, I’ve never been.”

Moderating the panel, Citrin Cooperman Managing Partner Mark Fagan said CEOs should take advantage of automated reports to monitor a company’s progress. Listing the different metrics to track, Fagan said he advises his clients to embrace technology to its full extent.

“It’s not sexy stuff when you’re operating your business,” Fagan said. “But it’s really what makes your company add value — having that statistical processing in place.”

Fagan’s column in the Business Journals, The CEO Evolution, was the inspiration for the night’s event.

To run a successful hospital, Dr. Votto said he recruits the best and brightest doctors. But with success comes inflated egos, he said.

How to keep those egos in check?

“I try to make them as uncomfortable as possible,” Votto said with a smile. “I tell them no one is indispensable and make sure no one feels really comfortable. When they do, they’re complacent.”

Votto, who has overseen \$65 million in expansions at the Hospital for Special Care in New Britain, said he further motivates his doctors with regular promotions. When there’s no further an employee can climb, he then promises to work with him or her personally to find a position outside the hospital.

The result is dedicated employees with a shared mission of improving the hospital.

Emblematic of the laid-back tech culture, Austin McChord said he takes a different approach to motivating his employees, by empowering everyone to think as strategically as he does.

The company, which marked its fourth year of 300 percent annual growth in 2013, has a



From left, CEOs Austin McChord, Linda McMahon, Paul Senecal, Dr. John Votto and Dean John Elliott of the UConn School of Business.

score board in the office of real-time company productivity running all day for employees to monitor at their leisure. One of the few attendees wearing jeans, McChord said he regularly asks his employees for input so it’s not just him thinking about where to take the company next.

Similarly, Paul Senecal of Affineco, said he strives for a culture of inclusiveness at his and his partner’s cleaning and maintenance company.

In order to motivate his employees, which mostly consist of low-skilled laborers, Senecal said he tries to orient everyone physically, emotionally and spiritually toward the same goal of providing customers the best service. The culture is a big shift from the one his dad commanded at his cleaning company.

“They used to call my father God at work,” Senecal said. “He was a big man ... all powerful. There was a fear factor to him.”

But rather than continue his father’s same practices, Senecal instead tries to communicate his expectation very clearly with his employees. His goal is for his clients to brag to their peers about how clean their buildings are, he said. His employees understand it is not about him, it is about pleasing the customers.