



Name: Steven Amendola

Company/Organization: Reaction Sciences Inc. Silicon Products / Grid Storage Technologies

Year organization started: RSI 2006 / GST 2008

Type of organizations: technology (manufacturing) start-ups

### **1. Define your leadership philosophy in a headline.**

*Treat people like people.*

All managers want quality people, and most people can be “quality” if their manager treats them like people: treats them with respect, fosters their curiosity, and builds camaraderie amongst the team.

### **2. You're a scientist in a business role. How does your background influence your performance leading a company?**

In science we're always trying to figure out *Why*: Why did that happen? Why do the results indicate this? And I apply that to my leadership style by making certain to tell my team why we're doing what we're doing. Employees are people and people have a curious nature. Not only that, but when you show them the “why” they gain a respect for their job and their role within the big picture; they feel involved in the process allowing them to self-initiate and to walk around with a wider view of the problem.

### **3. What is your vision as a serial entrepreneur? How has it evolved over your career?**

It's easier to define my vision of the future as opposed to my vision when I started out. I don't think I really saw myself as a serial entrepreneur. Standing from now though, ideally, I'd like to have a think tank where I can work with a team to think of an idea, get the idea to a point where it's worthy of being spun off, and then pass it off to others to take the idea and run with it without my day-to-day involvement of creating a company. So, in essence, I want to be the feeder into the think tank, and have the think tank be the serial entrepreneur, the developer of businesses.

Creating the ideas is what I'm best at and love most and it's where I want more of my time to be focused on down the line.

### **4. How do you define success for your organization from a leadership perspective?**

There are two gauges by which I measure success as a leader, both come from my time founding and leading Millennium Cell. The first is looking out at the parking lot after 5pm on a regular day and seeing 50% of the cars still there. While I'm more interested in results than hours worked – by no means do I count hours, I don't have a clock, in fact I hate clocks — but a pretty full parking lot at the end of the day without complaints means that they're putting the extra effort in because they believe in the mission and vision that I set forth.

The second measure is the vibe when walking through the halls and offices. I want this to be a comfortable, enjoyable environment. It's great when people are talking and laughing and having fun. At Millennium Cell I instituted “Pizza Fridays” – a carryover from my academic years – which was an informal time for everyone to get together and talk about whatever they pleased; they could be talking quarks or the baseball game or just relaxing. It made the group feel appreciated. You can't put a dollar amount on that, on the intangible result from treating people like people.



**5. And how do you define success for yourself, as a leader?**

My references. When someone is looking for a job a lot of emphasis is put on his/her references. But as a CEO I don't have a boss. Instead, I value the references from the people who work for me. And this is most evident when people who worked for me previously want to come back. It means a lot to me.

Last year when money was tight we had to let a few really great production guys go. I didn't want to do it, they were great employees and highly trained, but we were having funding issues. I called them recently to check in – they all had new jobs in similar lines of work – and all said that when I can provide them the security of a stable job they'd come back.

**6. What is unusual about how you run your organization?**

I am the anti-MBA type, nothing against MBAs, it's just not who I am. What I mean by this is that I don't like putting people in boxes; we don't have titles here nor do we have an organizational chart. The roles here aren't rectangles that sit next to each other. We're more like a jigsaw puzzle where the role is somewhat unique to the person and we're all intertwined with one another. I hire the person for what they can contribute instead of hiring to the job description. If I have two great candidates and one can't stand being behind the computer while the other is magnificent at it, I'll make sure that when placing them they balance each other out.

**7. What is your most critical leadership challenge?**

My greatest overall challenge comes from external forces, those outside my control. But the biggest leadership challenge is "defocus," getting distracted by other ideas. I'll go online and start some work on patents, looking at the various types of carbon for a project. As I start reading, ideas start coming into my head. They're all good, valid ideas. But these ideas came in while I was supposed to be focused on an active project. So I print out the info collected, put a note on it, and file it away for more research later. This helps me to an extent, but I will always have more ideas than I'm able to execute.

**8. Tell me about being a leader. What do you see as your responsibilities? What characteristics do you hold that are unique to your leadership?**

It's important for me to be the buffer between the Board and the employees, to absorb the pressure from above and safeguard the employees from the Board's concerns because we're a very entrepreneurial and innovative organization. Creativity drives us. It takes time to produce something so I have to constantly remind others that the employees are working even when it doesn't look like they are. Creativity takes time.

As to characteristics, I like to macro-manage not micromanage because I hired people to let them do their jobs, so how can I get so involved? Not to mention I don't enjoy micro-managing. It's also important for me, as the leader, to be confident, honest, and transparent because not only am I the example that the rest of the organization follows, but everyone takes their cues from the leader's emotional state. When the leader looks nervous, everyone gets worried.



**9. How has your leadership style evolved over your career?**

My responsibilities went up over the years as I took on more managerial positions and then started my own company. As a result I became more creative and versatile in my role to get more done and I learned to trust others to a greater degree.

I became aware that my decisions directly affect whether the company closes or not and thereby I've also become a fundraiser for the company. If I don't fundraise the lights go off. Back in November, we were down to the wire with funds running out before the end of the month. At the time we were in talks with an investor and also a potential strategic partner who agreed to a site visit towards the end of the month. The investor was moving along quickly, even so we were strapped for time so we made a deal with the landlord for half-a-month's rent and we negotiated with the power company to keep our power on for an extra week in order for us to keep the equipment running for the presentation. It was close, but luckily we got the money wired to us on November 30, 2pm.

In essence, my shoulders have broadened to take on more responsibility while, at the same time, I'm delegating more.

**10. How did you lead through the difficult economic climate of 2008 – 2010?**

Transparent communication. I remained truthful to my team and didn't hide my opinions. I told the employees where we were, what we had money for, and if I thought we could close with the investor, even if it wasn't looking good. Everyone knows there is risk working for a company like ours, especially during such a volatile market.

There are all sorts of gossip that can be destructive, and a lot of that is because management keeps secrets. When management is open it basically kills the gossip circle. I give them the bad news, so what's left to gossip about? And I know that when I give bad news that resumes are going out the door. I fully understand that. I even tell my employees not to be afraid of listing me as a reference. I'm not vindictive. They're jumping ship not because they don't like it here, but because they need to. And I get that.



**RSI (Reaction Sciences Inc.) Silicon Products LLC**

<http://www.rsi-silicon.com/>



RSI will be manufacturing solar grade silicon only. RSI's technology addresses the high cost of purification in a commercially viable chemical purification process, before silicon is produced.

Its founders recognized that the processing of solar grade energy was too expensive and dependent on the Siemens Process Methodology. RSI has rewritten the way to make solar grade silicon using proven processes from other industries. This new innovative methodology will assist many countries achieve their renewable energy goals by making Solar Energy a viable proposition for energy producers.

**Grid Storage Technologies**

<http://www.gridstoragetechnologies.com/>



Grid Storage Technologies has developed a proprietary, fully rechargeable zinc-air battery technology. GST's focus is on utility scale energy storage, however GST is working with strategic partners to pursue electric vehicle and other energy storage applications.

GST's battery cost is below a \$1.00 per watt. With 6 hours of storage in our standard module, the cost per watt/hour is approximately 16 cents. These costs are projected to decline in the coming years. Our battery technology is scalable, environmentally and operationally safe, has a very long life cycle, and has minimal operating cost. Our industry-leading cost and performance will enable our clients to generate superior investment returns on their storage assets.