



Name: Raymond McCreary

Currently: Seeking leadership opportunity with startup or turnaround situation.

Previously: CEO/Founder of Paragon Household Products (founded 1995; sold 2010)

Type of Company: Manufacturing and distribution of consumer goods

1) Define your leadership philosophy in a headline.

It comes down to three concepts:

- Vision: A leader must have a clear vision of a goal and be able to communicate it effectively to others.
- Inspiration: Getting others to believe in and buy into the vision, own it, embrace it and believe in it as much as you do.
- Team Management: Develop a working atmosphere where members inspire one another - their collective knowledge, skills and achievements surpass rote management direction.

2) How does one person develop that quality to inspire?

I am not sure a person can develop the quality to inspire. It is a combination of one's natural personality and a strong passion or belief. Since personalities are different, inspiration can come in different forms.

3) It sounds as if your three concepts build on each other, needing one to reach the others.

Correct. It starts with the leader and a vision. Then the need to clearly communicate and inspire others to help achieve the vision. Team management is the simple leveraging of the passions of others to achieve the vision/goal.

Each aspect becomes more externalized - vision being most internalized, inspiration involving both internal and external aspects and finally team management which, if handled correctly, is mostly an external element.

4) What was unusual about how you ran your company?

Allowing "the whole to become greater than the sum of the parts". This has to do with leveraging the passions of the team. One of the best things about my company was that I didn't have to make many decisions. Team members could and would identify problems and work with their co-workers to determine alternatives to resolve issues. Before final actualization, they would come to me, state the problem concisely and propose their best collective solution. They always made the best decision. I was constantly blown away by their teamwork and what they would come up with. Seeing my positive reactions to their solutions really reinforced the message of teamwork, further building their confidence. Over the last 10 years I can't think of any time where I was presented with a solution that I thought was a crummy idea.

5) Tell us about how you started your business.

Years prior, I was contracted by a Japanese firm to run a similar manufacturing facility and turn it around. In 6 months I took the company from an annual operating loss to profitability. Within the first year I was able to increase sales by 33%. With the increased growth and turnaround, the owners were able to sell the factory to a competitor located in the Midwest, who then closed our east coast factory within two years.



When the dust settled from the closing and subsequent consolidation, I came back to New Jersey. After being burned by my previous employer and not having a non-compete in place, I did what I knew best: I opened up the exact same type of company. All of the previous infrastructure was also there, we still had relationships with sales reps, vendors, truckers, etc. They were all quite supportive of my efforts beyond simply wanting to keep their accounts.

6) So what was the vision when you first started?

My vision was very specific. Start a small manufacturing company that was self-sustaining and that would provide employment for my former workers. It was very simple and a somewhat small vision. Along the way, the vision grew to encompass my belief in keeping manufacturing in the United States rather than outsourcing.

7) Had you planned on selling the company? How was it in line with your vision?

Everyone is entitled to make one or two mistakes. The major pitfall in my vision and planning was that I never planned an exit strategy (which I now tell people is one of the top ten most important things to account for when starting a business). Reason being; it helps you focus your growth and gets you to be where you want to be faster.

In my case, I had no family to come in as second generation to continue the business. Looking back, I would have grown the company in a more focused way, making it more sellable from the start. I really only began that transition in year 8 or 9. Still it was not a priority because I was having too much fun running the company. It turns out that before it needed to become a prime focus, someone approached me to sell.

8) During your time at Paragon how did you define success for your organization as a leader?

As a leader, I would define success for Paragon as "how we grew" - achieving what we did, because of the individuals involved and how we worked together.

The people, the teamwork, shared passions and a commitment to success, are what really moved the company forward. The people were happy and had secure jobs because of their hard work.

It was rewarding for me to watch as well as to be a part of...it seems like I did not have to do much. They made it work and the company grew as a result. All I did was provide some vision, inspiration and a touch of management.

I never had to pull from the top; they were always pushing from the bottom.

I'd like to say I am the smartest guy in the world and that I made it all happen, but I didn't - and I am smart enough to know that!



Raymond McCreary

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Mr. McCreary's background includes a multi-disciplined education and executive tenure with large multinational companies, both domestic and abroad. Accumulated experiences allowed for his eventual exploration of an inherited entrepreneurial gene. In a second career, beginning with a series of personal small turnarounds, acquisitions and divestitures, Ray established his own manufacturing company by 1995. After its recent sale, he now advises and mentors other businesses and its executives. Placing a high value on human capital, he offers practical solutions to organizational and operational challenges, integrating strategic insight and tactical application.

