

LEADERSHIP IN THE FIELD: Interviews With Global Leaders

By Russell Reynolds Associates
with Roger O. Crockett

Motorola Solutions Chairman and CEO discusses how to communicate effectively in a challenging environment, avoid corporate arrogance and preserve the corporate culture in order to excel under pressure.

Roger Crockett: So Tom Peters the leadership guru wrote the legendary book *In Search of Excellence* back in 1982 when he popularized his term management by wandering around. Today things are different, more global. How do you recommend managing in an environment like this?

Greg Brown: Well I still think you do manage by wandering about, but you do that and manage by staying connected. So it's gotten a little bit additive. There's no substitute for personal interaction in the cafeteria, in a hallway, in other offices. But now, to your point, it's staying connected electronically, by email, Internet, video.

Roger Crockett: How do you communicate messages to your troops in times of a crisis or real challenging times – the economy forces you to spin off a part of your business or you have a restructuring. Then what do you do? What is key to making sure that everyone remains engaged and everyone remains interested?

Greg Brown: Roger, that's a great question. I think it's combining the *why* with the *what*. If the *what* is a layoff, if the *what* is a discontinuation of a product - what is the *why*, and what do we do next? So the reason as an example we divested our [mobile] networks [infrastructure] business is because it's not strategic to Motorola. We only have 3% market share. The employees and associates are better in the hands of a leading infrastructure player instead of a subscale one. So you communicate the reality of the situation and what's happening. But more important Roger, to your point, you have to communicate why, why are we doing this? Why is this good for the firm? Why is it good for me? Any communication has to be individualized and internalized because every person that hears it, regardless of the medium, has to judge it, react to it, and then decide what to do.

Roger Crockett: So if it's something monumental like a spin off, like some sort of reorganization, then how do you impart that message?

Greg Brown: I think typically the most effective way is a video Webcast. It's important not just for people to hear the message, it's important that they see you, observe you. Hear your tone, see your vulnerability, your honesty, your character. And then I always believe there's no communications without Q&A. So I don't want it to be one-way I want it to be two-way. As a leader you are always responsible to make sure that you're willing to hear dissenting opinions, willing to be self-deprecating, willing to say, "I don't know, we're in this together." So you can send an email, and there's times when that's appropriate, but in mission critical [situations] I think it's in person and Webcast.

Roger Crockett: Well, let's talk a little bit about culture then. Culture is always difficult to create, and then of course, to maintain. And I would think it's even more difficult to maintain in times of economic struggle, in times of corporate change. How important do you think it is to maintain the culture? And how do you go about doing that?

Greg Brown: I think culture is two things. It's what you do and it's how you do it. That's plain and simple what it is. Culture is the representation of the leader and the leadership team, and it's an aggregation of the individuals. So a culture is defined largely by its leader and its people. It's about what you focus on and how you do it. What and how. I think that if you're in a crisis and you're trying to define your culture it's too late. By the way, it's not a binary thing. It's not a "we have it and it's done." You've got to reinforce it, communicate, inject, revitalize, represent, embody—everyday, every week, 24/7.

- Roger Crockett:** **Greg, what about, maintaining the balance between culture and strategy. Sometimes culture can be almost detrimental.**
- Greg Brown: Absolutely. Culture trumps strategy every time. You can have the best laid plans but if you don't have the right people and the right environment, the power points, the vision, the words, then the mission goes nowhere. So I don't think of them as disconnected. I actually focus more on people and if you have the right people you will have and get the right strategy. When you make a wrong decision or you require modification or an adaptation to the strategy, you by definition have the resilience and the adaptability because you picked the right people with the right values and behaviors. So [culture and strategy] are intertwined.
- Roger Crockett:** **We all understand that people are key. People get a little antsy during difficult economic times. People get a little antsy when a company is spinning off and may begin to think about, "Is this going to be right for me." How do you handle that so that you can preserve what you have there in order to execute perfectly?**
- Greg Brown: I think great companies and great cultures have an outside-in view, not an inside-out view. So customers provide insight and oxygen. Investors and the media provide observation and criticism. I think those are very useful mechanisms to listen and learn and incorporate reality—good or bad, right or wrong, fair or unfair. We put those ingredients into our thinking and into our behaviors and acknowledge them.
- Roger Crockett:** **Very often leadership teams don't appear to get the ride right when they're faced by challenge. It might be an economic challenge. It might be a marketplace challenge, a shift in the marketplace, a shift in competition, but companies stumble and lose their way. Why is that? How does that always happen? What can be done to correct that?**
- Greg Brown: My view is that it's largely a failure of leadership. People and organizations reflect their leadership. Whatever the challenge: it could be economic, it could be technological, it could be geographical, but usually it's a reflection of failed leadership. It's leadership that doesn't incorporate or change fast enough, leadership that clings to the familiar and pushes and stiff-arms the unknown. Leadership that will ride a product too long. Leadership that will become insular and withdrawn in adversity and not know what to do.
- Roger Crockett:** **With culture there are many examples where arrogance somehow creeps in to a corporate culture. What are the checks that you would recommend a management team take to stifle that and allow performance, high performance over the long term?**
- Greg Brown: That's a very good point I should have mentioned earlier because that's another common thing. I think arrogance needs to be held in check and is the responsibility of management, the CEO and the board. Boards don't manage companies but they do govern them. And boards are responsible for CEO succession planning and the validation of strategy. So they must be curious and penetrating and demanding, not in a managerial way but in a validating way. So I think part of keeping senior-level or CEO arrogance in check is the responsibility of the board. Now, hopefully you're not picking a CEO in the first place that has that hubris or those characteristics, but the board plays a very important role.
- As a CEO it's important for me to get information from multiple levels because by the time everything comes to me it's good. People do not want to come into my office and say, "I blew it, we have a problem, I made a mistake." That's just human nature. Part of the way I invite people to [speak openly] is by sharing my fallibilities and my mistakes. And I want to make sure that we have an environment where that bi-directional exchange is healthy. The second answer to your question is *trust but verify*. Go visit a product manager, go out on the assembly line, go to a key supplier, visit your customers. And then have your time team do the same.
- Roger Crockett:** **And I think that's so key because sometimes you might find that this hubris, this arrogance is creeping into level 2 or 3, beneath the executive management team, and sometimes it's hard to pick that up until it's too late.**
- Greg Brown: Roger I think success is the biggest impediment to growth but arrogance is death. It's death for a company.

Roger Crockett: So particularly in times of challenge what mistake can a leader not afford to make?

Greg Brown: Don't succumb to the convenient or the quick. Sometimes you'll feel like you're on the clock and a decision has to be made. Appropriate deliberation over expedience is fundamentally key, and some of the mistakes that I made I think I felt the pressure to act too quickly. Over the last three years, a period I would consider to be crunch time, when this company faced some very dark days—questions about liquidity, [doubts about the viability] of our mobile devices business, shareholder activist Carl Icahn's pressure on our board that was stressed—the big mistakes that I made were around people and probably moving too quickly.

Roger Crockett: You mentioned Carl Icahn, a gentleman who has become familiar to a lot of different boards in the corporate world. What can you share that might be educational for a board or a management team when you have an outsider that is pressuring the company for one reason or another, justly or unjustly? And in your case you decided to accept that representative onto your board. But how do you as a management team deal with that kind of outside pressure?

Greg Brown: I was an advocate, a big advocate of settling with Carl Icahn and inviting him onto our board because if he sees what we see I would suspect he'll have a better understanding of the business and a better understanding of the situation and could be collaborative in resolution. I think that the advice I'd give is be very straightforward, be very open, and work together.



Greg Brown is Chairman and CEO of Motorola Solutions. He joined Motorola in 2003 and worked his way up to CEO in 2008. Amid unstable economic conditions, Brown led the separation of Motorola into two publicly traded companies in January 2011, and subsequently completed the sale of the networks division. His leadership under fire has helped streamline Motorola Solutions into a stable government and enterprise systems provider.



Roger O. Crockett is a veteran business writer, thought leader and speaker. He is the former Chicago Deputy Bureau Chief for *BusinessWeek* magazine and a contributor to *Harvard Business Review*. His perspectives on business, leadership and diversity are trusted by many of the world's top executives and entrepreneurs.