

Stay Atop Crucial Calls

” Michael Mink

While delegation is important, leaders must stay on top of certain matters. Sam Walton set the pace for other Wal-Mart^{WMT} executives by walking through stores; he didn't want them isolated in the office. Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook's^{FB} founder, has said, “The question I ask myself almost every day is, ‘Am I doing the most important thing I could be doing?’ ”

Set the tone. Leading by example is a constant for top executives, especially with respect to what a company stands for. “As CEO, the one thing I cannot delegate is setting the culture of the company,” said Harry Herington, chief executive of NIC^{EGOV}, which provides online solutions for government. “Company culture establishes the integrity, passion and dedication of an organization. It governs not only how the employees perform, but also our customers' perception of our values and integrity.”

Be a people person. Know as many of those who work for you as best you can. “As CEO, I believe that establishing trust between you and your employees is paramount and something that is impossible to delegate,” Herington told IBD. “Verify by allowing your employees to get to know you. I travel to each of NIC's 30 offices throughout the U.S. and hold small, informal sessions where employees are encouraged to ask me professional and personal questions. Employees need to know and trust the person who is running the company.”

Jason Tillis, president of Imperial Bag & Paper, a distributor of paper goods and janitorial supplies in the Northeast, has a routine: “Each morning I walk through our offices and warehouses to say good morning and check in with different people to learn how they are and what they are working on. Before 10 a.m., I have usually been through our warehouse visiting with our drivers and packers, and through finance and customer service.”

Be an ambassador. Michael Gold, president of Intermedia, which handles business cloud service, digs directly into his company's key relationships. “This could be a partner, such as Microsoft^{MSFT}, where I personally maintain senior relationships, or with our largest and most important resellers and customers,” he said.

Follow the money. Gold makes it a point to touch all aspects of the products his company offers. “Intermedia is about world-class delivery of world-class cloud products, so I touch anything and everything product related,” he said. “Whether it is design, the technology employed, user experience or how we build out to scale and support it, I personally pay a lot of attention.”

Jeff Schlicht, founder and CEO of Auctiva, which develops tools for online sellers, says he stays involved especially early in projects to make sure company standards are met and emphasized.

“I'll ask to get invited more to the review process or get in on a call, or ask a team to show me where they are on a project, or what they are currently thinking regarding it,” he said. “Then I can say, ‘Well, what about this?’ and I can bring up holes I may see.”

Know numbers. Mike Ward, CEO of North America and Europe for USForex, a foreign exchange provider, wants more than metrics solely interpreted for him: “As a leader, I am very data driven, and analyzing data drives a lot of my decisions.”

Get it. The boss should especially be on top of customers, said Dave Williams, president of We Heart It, an image-based social network: “Whether it's product design, operations, marketing or customer service, enter the discussion if you don't think the customer is being well served in a particular area. By your diving in on occasion, the team will learn what you care about most.