



Habits Coach

Leadership Conversation with Lisa Nichols, CEO at Technology Partners

As a leader, what are some ways you bolster and sustain your own confidence?

1. I start every day with a quiet time. I spend time in the Word of God as well as in prayer and reflection. When I start my day like this, I am confident that I am not alone and that whatever comes my way, I will be equipped to handle it.
2. Stretching beyond my comfort zone and trying something new has always been a good confidence booster. The uncomfortable suddenly becomes comfortable and my confidence is deepened.
3. I think having a support group outside of Technology Partners helps as well. I have several groups that I belong to such as CEO Forum, YPO CFN and my "Rooted" group, an Executive Women's Bible study.
4. I believe in a life of learning. The more I can know and understand about my field of expertise as well as the world in general, the more confidence I have when facing new situations/challenges.
5. I also believe in planning and preparation. The more prepared I am the more confident that I become.

What are your go-to strategies for building self-esteem and confidence in others?

1. Recognizing those in your organization with specificity is one way to build confidence and self-esteem in others. It is even better if it can be done in front of others.
2. Success builds confidence. Serving employees to help them in whatever way you can to be successful is a great strategy for building confidence in others.
3. Giving those in your organization a voice and respecting their ideas and opinions is another great way to build confidence and self-esteem in others.

What does it take to build strong, cohesive, successful teams? Do you have a "feedback loop" system in place and if so, what does it look like in terms of process and results?

I believe that there are several things that need to be present to build strong, cohesive successful teams. Employees need to connect what they do every day to a bigger purpose. They need to understand how what they do every day affects the overall objectives of the organization. Having a set of Core Values that drive the behavior of every team member both internally and externally is paramount. These Core Values need to be communicated practically, clearly and often. Well defined processes are also necessary so that confusion can be eliminated and expectations can be clearly understood. Accountability to the Core Values, processes and one another is the final ingredient. These components together build trust among the team and unifies them to work for common goals. A unified, passionate and engaged team is unstoppable.

We do have a "feedback loop" system that we use within our organization. Surveys are released on a quarterly basis and internal customers are asked to rate the services of their internal vendors. The goal is always to improve a department's Customer Service Rating (CSR). In addition, for the past 6 years, we have used an outside service to survey both our consultants and clients to determine our Net Promoter Score (NPS). Fortunately, every year our NPS has been 10 – 15 times the industry average.

When you feel overwhelmed or unfocused, or have lost focus temporarily, what do you do? How do you create a culture of productivity within your organization?

Often a feeling of being overwhelmed is the result of over commitment. When feeling overwhelmed, I look for things that I can eliminate or delegate. Maybe I have taken on too much volunteer work or have agreed to unnecessary meetings. Narrowing activities down to just those things that are most important can often help. When I lose focus it is time to step back and often just get back to the basics. What are the best uses of my time and mental energies? Are there lower level activities that I am handling that I can offload? We use a tool in our organization called Trello that helps everyone stay more focused on the most important tasks at hand and get the most out of their day.

How has a failure, or apparent failure, set you up for later success? Do you have a "favorite failure" of yours?

Several years ago, we were trying to expand into too many new markets and into too many new lines of business all at the same time. The metro expansion was a complete failure. We spent way too many resources with very little to show for it. Today, we have adopted the philosophy that we will focus on gaining moderate success on a new initiative before embarking on something new.

Many years ago, I interviewed for a position that I was completely unprepared for. From my point of view the interview was a disaster and I was quite certain that I had blown the opportunity for this position that I really wanted. Fortunately, I advanced to the next round of interviews and ultimately did land the job. I vowed at that time to never be that unprepared in the future. I would spend whatever time necessary to make sure I did my homework and prepare for every important meeting.

As a leader, what new belief, behavior, or habit has most improved your life? What are your best strategies for creating and improving organizational health and well-being?

When we first started the business, every day was very tactical. One of the best habits that we have adopted in the last several years is to schedule "planning days". These are days where we spend reviewing the plan, tweaking the plan, and tracking against it. If you don't take the time to step back, strategize and then plan, it will not happen as there is always the tyranny of the urgent to contend with. One of our favorite sayings is, "Plan your work, and work your plan."

Who has been the most influential leader in your life, shaping your teachings on the subject of leadership?

In January, I graduated from a three-year leadership program within CEO Forum led primarily by CEO Forum leadership and Dr. Richard Blackaby. I would say that this three- year program was one of the most transformational times of my career. It was great to learn from my peers as well.

If you were to boil it down to the most important habit that makes for an exceptional leader, what would that be?

Servant Leadership