

Creating An Individual Platform

Article by Herb Rubenstein, President, Sustainable Business Group

Introduction

In related articles I have written about the distinction between what a “leader” does in organizations and what a “leader of leader” does. Today, many leaders in America are primarily problem solvers.

“Leaders of leaders” have a different role. They develop a platform upon which the organization and the organization’s “leaders” set the tone, ethic and direction of an organization as well as figure out the best answers to systemic challenges and entire classes of problems an organization can face. In a related article I have defined what a platform is and how to create a platform driven organization. This article complements this analysis because it has become clear that leaders of leaders must, for themselves, as individuals who want to become “leaders of leaders”, create a platform upon which they build their own identity, their own operating principles and their own set of beliefs and rules to guide their lives.

Key Elements of an Individual Platform

The first element of creating an individual platform is to be able to understand one’s self well enough to know one’s strengths, one’s weaknesses, one’s most important and essential desires/goals and most importantly, one must determine what set of rules or principals one will use in attempting to reach his or her goals. In order to accomplish this first element, one must write down and review and study one’s answers to these questions. The philosopher Sam Keen takes an interesting and most unusual stance on this topic in an interview with Bill Moyers. He states that every person must have a “myth,” a guiding, larger than life story line, with a huge purpose and huge set of goals that guides one’s life. This myth that one creates for one’s own life becomes the perch from which one views all of life, creates a context for one’s live, and ultimately influences every decision and attitude of the individual. Basically, the “myth” becomes an essential part of the identity of that individual. Sam Keen uses the word “myth” in a totally positive way. That myth can be as simple as, “I am no longer just a face in the crowd. I now must make a difference in the world,” or “I shall serve as an example to others,” or “I shall be the richest or most politically powerful person in the world.”

The second element of creating an individual platform is to communicate the essence of that platform to others. As George Herbert Mead’s work compiled in *Mind, Self and Society* clearly explains, the “self” (which includes one’s platform as a core element) exists only in relation to other selves. It is the interaction with and response from other “selves” that helps guide and ultimately shape one’s “self.” Taking your newly developed platform “on the road” and sharing it with others is an essential element in the refinement of a platform upon which one can guide one’s life.

The third element of creating a strong individual platform is to begin, in the short run, to live consistently with the key elements of that platform. This burst of activity, energy and new expression of “self-direction” may not be received well by all with whom one comes into contact. One must realize this is a burst of activity that must over time be moderated in order to avoid burnout. However, one must push through this initial period to find “balance” between what is needed to live consistent with the platform and what is needed to allow one’s experience to “inform the platform” where it leads to behaviors that do not work for you or others.

The fourth element of creating a platform is to incorporate the basic elements of the platform into a long term plan for one’s self, family and organizations. When planning even for one’s self, significant others must be consulted, but not necessarily obeyed. When planning for organizations, one must win over enough supporters to win politically to carry forth the plan consistent with the platform one has created.

The fifth element of creating a platform is to know that it is an evolving set of documents, ideas, concepts and actions. Action will inform the ideas and concepts that form the core of your platform. Experience will provide the wisdom necessary to carry forth one’s life consistent with the platform that one has set forth. Experience will also provide a full complement of challenges to the platform that one creates for one’s self. It will allow “failure” to test the very core of the platform. It may, even temporarily, “defeat the platform.”

Sustaining and Growing the Individual Platform

Eventually, one may find that experience will become more supportive of one’s platform or it will guide one through the school of hard knocks to reform, refine and redirect the platform so that the platform is a strong enabler of the individual to accomplish his or her life goals. The key to sustaining the individual platform is always communicating the platform as one lets others know more about one’s self. Over time, you will become known as the “person who [fill in the blank]...”, or “the person who would not allow that, etc. Once one becomes known more for one’s platform, rather than one’s performance, race, looks or wealth or other common 21st century criteria that guides one’s interaction with one another, then the world will, if the platform is good, probably become more supportive.

Conclusion

The idea of a personal platform to guide one’s life is neither new nor radical, but it is not often discussed in western societies. The process I have described in this short article is only a start to creating a sustainable, evolving platform for one’s life. But the process is not overwhelmingly complex. It can be started today and it can be undertaken quite rapidly. Most importantly, is an act of creation, an act which will help define and orient the “self” and one’s identity, and can be used as an essential element by an individual who seeks to lead others and make a positive difference in this world. We believe it is an essential element for those who strive to be leaders of leaders.

About the Author

Herb Rubenstein is the President of Sustainable Business Group a consulting firm to businesses. The headquarters of the Sustainable Business Group is Denver, Colorado. He is co-author of Breakthrough, Inc. – High Growth Strategies for Entrepreneurial Organizations (Prentice Hall/Financial Times, 1999). He also serves as an Adjunct Professor of Strategic Planning George Washington University, and has been an Adjunct Professor of Entrepreneurism at George Mason University and Colorado State University. He has his law degree from Georgetown University, his Master of Public Affairs from the LBJ School of Public Affairs, a graduate degree in sociology from the University of Bristol in Bristol, England and was a Phi Beta Kappa/Omicron Delta Kappa graduate from Washington and Lee University in 1974. His email address is herb@sbizgroup.com and he can be reached at 303 910-7961.