

# Making Leadership Personal

By Nancy Reardon

At Campbell, we strive to inspire our people to achieve extraordinary results. In my experience, reaching extraordinary heights requires a personal commitment. This is especially true of top leaders, which for us means our global leadership team of 350 leaders from around the world. Put simply: No one has ever achieved extraordinary success without a personal commitment to the work—whether an athletic activity, artistic endeavor, or business enterprise.

Like many companies, Campbell provides employees with the opportunity to sharpen their skills through classes. Our efforts are organized within Campbell University. Classes range from finance, marketing, and other functional areas, to how to bring our leadership model to life and the business benefits of diversity and inclusion. But creating a sustainable leadership-based culture requires more.

Beyond the classroom, Campbell offers a unique development opportunity: The CEO Institute is a two-year, mission-driven program focused on personal leadership development for both aspiring and seasoned managers in our organization, who are ready to take their leadership skills to a new level.

Currently, we are in the middle of our third CEO Institute. Each class has had between 20 and 24 members composed of a cross-section of the company. Participants represent different geographies, business units, and functions. Highly rated talent from across the organization are eligible for the program based on their performance and their potential to contribute at an even higher level in the future.

**Campbell develops its top talent through a leadership program that harnesses learners' unique experiences and values.**



Candidates are nominated by their business unit president or functional leader. The nomination process is an outcome of Campbell's organization resource planning process. As the title implies, the CEO Institute is led by our CEO, Doug Conant, and his collaborator, Mette Norgaard. I and members of our learning and development staff manage the program and provide ongoing support to the participants.

Some people are fortunate to be born with a skill or talent. Some develop gregarious personalities and are naturally extroverted—*Es* on the Myers-Briggs personality indicator. Others are introverts and gain strength from focusing inward—*Is* in Myers-Briggs parlance. While some people may be predisposed to leadership, the notion of a born leader is rare. While leading comes easier to some than others, inspired leadership requires effort.

With the CEO Institute, Campbell provides participants with the opportunity to fully develop their leadership abilities. We give them the resources and the framework to explore a broad range of leaders from different walks of life and, most importantly, the time required to realize their full potential and apply this knowledge to their responsibilities at Campbell.



### **Why a CEO institute?**

Campbell's mission is to build the world's most extraordinary food company by nourishing peoples' lives everywhere, every day. To accomplish this, we need to cultivate a cadre of world-class leaders who can deliver business results today and also steer the organization into the future. It's about today and tomorrow.

With the CEO Institute, we strive to create the most meaningful leadership experience participants have ever had. To do this, we've created an environment conducive to personal exploration and also provided the timeframe to absorb and reflect on a variety of inputs, including a variety of feedback mechanisms. For example, we incorporate feedback through surveys, such as the *7 Habits* and our employee engagement survey that we conduct through Gallup.

Delivering a truly meaningful leadership experience can't be achieved in a half-day off-site course or through a series of classroom assignments. Through the program, we give our best and brightest the gift of time. There are few periods in a career when you actually have the time to reflect, process, and apply changes, especially deeply personal ones such as leadership. It is critical that we provide participants with the time necessary to truly work the material, understand the feedback they've received, and integrate what they've learned into their lives. A two-year residential program gives participants the opportunity to take in information from a variety of sources, the time to process that information, and then develop personal and lasting leadership philosophies.

According to Doug, "To strengthen and accelerate our growth as leaders, it is essential that we deepen our understanding of ourselves and our impact on others and that we study a broad landscape of leadership philosophies to intelligently share our own unique leadership voice."

Doug is personally involved in all aspects—developing content, teaching, communicating with class members, and sharing lessons from his more than 30 years in business. The amount of time Doug dedicates to this endeavor is rarely seen among CEOs. Many CEOs may address similar groups for a few hours. We've all experienced it before: A CEO helicopters in and makes an

appearance at a dinner to address a group and then leaves as soon as dessert is served. Not Doug. He's all in. An active instructor, he's fully present during the entire two-year journey. He is deeply committed to sharing his leadership experience with others.

### **All models are wrong; some are useful**

Campbell's leadership model is rooted in inspiring trust. It's similar to models used by other companies. However, Doug likes to remind class participants that all models are wrong, but some are useful. Why are models wrong? Because they are not tailored to the individual.

We all have unique life experiences—different upbringings, belief systems, values, and styles. In my experience, corporate leadership models are based on sound principles, and by design, they are created to work broadly across an organization. However, the one shortcoming of such models is that they do not account for individuality.

A unique aspect to the CEO Institute is our holistic approach. We look at the whole person—the time they spend at work, the time they spend at home, the work they do in the broader community, and what inspires them. We work hard to integrate all aspects of leadership: physical and mental health, personal and professional relationships, and work-life integration. Many people have shared how the program has helped improve their relationships with their children or how they've shared some of the experiences with their partners. For example, early on in the program, we work on energy management techniques, which have implications far beyond the office walls.

Through the CEO Institute, we push participants to develop personal leadership models based on their backgrounds and beliefs. We hope these models will be in harmony with Campbell's model. When in harmony, you have the perfect combination of

an authentic leader who can thrive within the Campbell framework and inspire others.

### How the program works

Our approach requires dedication, commitment, and a willingness to be open and work the material. We reflect, we study, we discuss, we debate, and then we act.

It all starts with a personal commitment letter. Once the class is selected, each participant is required to handwrite a two-page letter to Doug outlining their personal commitment to the program and what they hope to achieve. Essentially, it is their promise to Doug that they, too, are all in. It's important for people to choose to participate, because the journey requires serious reflection about the next era of their careers and what type of leaders they want to be.

The program is divided into five modules with intensive multiday meetings for each, followed by time to reflect and study. There is a rhythm and continuity to the program. In between modules, participants have a variety of homework assignments, including reading, handwritten letters to Doug outlining their goals and plans, and peer-coaching meetings with another member of the program.

We are trying to foster an environment in which participants are able to gain insight through the experiences they have in class, begin to formulate ideas and opinions during the class, and then take the time to not only distill what they've learned through a handwritten letter, but apply it. The key is to begin to immediately integrate their insights in all aspects of their lives. The peer-coaching framework really helps keep people on track in between modules and provides the equivalent of a personal trainer or executive coach.

The idea is to expose participants to variety of leadership models, styles, and voices and provide them with the

time and tools needed to develop their own model. Reading assignments might include *Level 5 Leadership: The Triumph of Humility & Fierce Resolve* by Jim Collins, or an article from a journal. We don't expect all authors to resonate with everyone, so at times, we ask participants to select a book on their own, such as a biography of a leader that inspires them.

Throughout the program, I and other members of Campbell's executive leadership team share our personal leadership journeys with the class. We go beyond our corporate biographies and talk about the people who've inspired us, the choices we've made, and the lessons we've learned. I have a personal passion for this program and have come to know the participants on a very personal level through the work we do together and the information we share about our families, teams, and inspirations.

Many participants have asked me about my experience as a working mother and how I've tried to integrate family and work so that I have a very rich home life and a very fulfilling career. For instance, at a recent module, I shared the experience of taking my children on college visits with a participant who is about to embark on the same journey with his daughter. We were walking across the Brooklyn Bridge at the end of the day sharing personal experiences that would probably never come up in an office environment. There are many moments like this, and as a result, each class gets to see the personal side of Campbell's most senior leaders.

The first module is focused on mastering the fundamentals of leadership. It involves viewing leadership as a craft to be nurtured. We increase the self awareness of the class and their personal leadership with a 360-degree survey of each attendee's leadership by their peers, supervisors, and colleagues. This survey provides the foundation for everything that follows.

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Figure 1 | **A Commitment to Extraordinary Leadership**



After several months and a bit of homework, the class reunites for the second module, called “Raise Your Sights.” Between each module, participants have homework assignments, including the handwritten letters and reading material. We encourage them to think, learn, and apply as they go.

In this module, we broaden our focus and explore leaders across different industries and fields. The cornerstone is attending the World Business Forum, where participants hear multiple perspectives on leadership from the likes of Jack Welch, David Gergen, Jim Collins, and others. As with the reading assignments, some speakers will resonate with participants more than others. The main goal of this module is for participants to increase awareness of their leadership preferences and start looking ahead to what it will take for them to become extraordinary leaders.

After each day of the forum, the class gathers for dinner, discussion, and exercises designed to apply what

they heard from the speakers to their own leadership journey. Following the forum, we spend a full day together as a group working specific exercises to help participants home in on specific steps they will take to improve their leadership until the next module.

The third module is “Getting to the Heart of Leadership.” This section is where participants synthesize lessons from the first half of the program and begin to focus inward. This is a deeply introspective period during which we ask the class to answer some fundamental questions: Who am I? Why do I choose to lead? How do I choose to walk in the world? How do I make my leadership real? At this stage, participants are asked to draft a personal leadership philosophy.

We stress that the philosophy must be authentic, clear, congruent, credible, and rooted in their personal beliefs. The final outcome of this module is to create a specific development plan to bring their philosophy to life.

The fourth module focuses on “Growing Your Culture” and is designed to help participants inspire others to give the very best of themselves. Here, we focus on coaching and techniques to create cultures and environments where people can thrive. The key is to create a sustainable model whereby our top leaders can begin transferring their knowledge and experience to others in the company.

The fifth and final module, “Aiming for Mastery,” entails a look back, a look forward, and the passing of the baton to the next class. Looking back, participants reflect on the program and what’s changed for them, particularly what they will do differently as a leader. Looking ahead, participants declare what they’ve discovered about their leadership voice: who they are, what they stand for, and how they are committed to continually build upon their lifelong leadership journey.

The culmination of the program is all about paying it forward and applying

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what has been learned. When participants finish the institute, they will have rethought their management style and how their unique leadership voice fits within Campbell's model. Ideally, it makes them stronger leaders and more effective coaches and managers. As their final act, participants address the incoming CEO Institute class and share a few words about their experience, as a new group begins its journey (Figure 1).

### Creating tomorrow's leaders

Through the CEO Institute, Campbell is creating a sustainable leadership program that will outlive the current senior management of the company and prepare future generations of senior management. Of the three dozen people who have gone through the program, many have been promoted into more significant roles at Campbell. And these leaders continue to expand their influence and pay it forward by helping others in the company become better leaders.

Beyond creating better and more focused leaders, another key outcome of the CEO Institute is that our top leaders forge stronger connections with each other. Increased networking is a very important aspect of the program. These relationships have resulted in higher degrees of trust and increased

collaboration, and undoubtedly have enabled people to better navigate the company.

Ultimately, creating better leaders is about driving business results. For instance, employees from our biscuit business in Australia have collaborated with employees from our Pepperidge Farm business in North America to develop new products. The genesis of this work was sparked by two members of the CEO Institute.

At the end of our fiscal year in July 2011, Doug will step down as president and CEO, making the current CEO Institute the last he will lead. Doug has helped transform Campbell with his leadership philosophies, and he will leave many legacies behind, of which the CEO Institute may be his most enduring. His leadership philosophies will live on through the institute graduates who have benefited from his perspective.

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