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President's message: The many hats of a business owner - by Joe Bodio

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A successful owner of a company, especially a small to midsize business, has the responsibility of wearing several hats to ensure a happy and productive work environment. Some roles seem obvious for the head of a company to have; however, in my 25 years of serving as president and CEO of LAN-TEL Communications, Inc., I've found myself taking on roles I never thought I would.

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A typical role for a president to assume is that of a manager. Over the years, I've managed my staff in order to maintain a friendly and efficient atmosphere at the office. As an owner, it's not enough just to hire employees and send them on their way: you must work with each one to help them grow into their role so they can, in turn, hire and manage others to further the company's goals.

In addition to being a manager, I've found myself as the decision maker on many issues. Understandably, one would think this is a typical job for the president of a company. However, there are times when I've made decisions for others who had difficulty finding a resolution on their own. Similar to this is when I've played the role of facilitator, in an effort to move projects forward when others struggled to do so. Every CEO will find that they must take on these personas, especially in a small business where employees are forced to wear multiple hats of their own, to help guide them through their endeavors and become successful in their own right.

Yet, there are also some unconventional hats that a business owner may not necessarily plan on wearing. As the CEO of a small, yet growing company myself, I've been allowed the opportunity to become a friend to my colleagues, not just a boss. I've developed a relationship with my staff to the point where we've chatted about their weekends and what their families are up to, and I even had the honor of attending some of their weddings over the years. Thus, this has led me to fill the role of confidant in the sense that my employees have confided in me and expressed their problems to me, whether work-related or otherwise, in confidence.

On the other hand, this has placed me between two opposing sides at times and forced me to play referee to mitigate conflicts that perhaps could have been mediated on their own, or by a peer. Unfortunately, this has periodically led me to becoming an enforcer during difficult situations when

issues weren't being resolved, and I needed to take it upon myself to confront the matter and ensure everyone met a resolution.

In addition to embodying these various personas, an effective owner also plays an active role in professional organizations. For example, I have not only been a member of industry associations, such as ASM, NECA, and the Local 103, but over the years I've held several positions within them, enabling me to gain valuable insight into what's going on in my industry, stay educated on new developments that may help my company, and help new business owners succeed in their own ventures.

Over many years of owning a company, I've found being a leader is the most important hat a president or CEO can, and should, wear. A leader encompasses all of these personas and takes it one step further. I've found that to truly be a successful CEO, one must guide their staff, not just by telling them what to do, but leading by example. When introducing a new initiative to the company, leaders immerse themselves as much as, if not more than, what they require of their staff. They work alongside their colleagues, and hold everyone up to the same standard that the president holds for him or herself. Leaders become the epitome of what they'd like their employees to be, which in turn earns their colleagues' trust, and motivates them to be the best they can be.

Most successful business owners, presidents, and CEOs will wear many of these hats at one point or another in their career. As I've learned first-hand, the key is to try on several of them, and find the ones that work best for your company and staff. Over time, you'll find the unique balance of when to step in and lead the charge, and when to take a step back and trust your employees that works best for your organization's success – and that is something you can hang your hat on.

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