

**Amy Ritchie, Partner Profile:***Get comfortable with the uncomfortable*

---

**What is one characteristic that you believe every leader should possess?**

Being passionate and recognizing that your people are your most important asset. When a leader has passion, it translates into all aspects of his or her life. They can become an inspiration to many. But just having passion isn't enough. A leader also needs to be able to effectively communicate the path forward. Building empathy with your employees and helping them make the connections between the path forward and their role in delivering the path is one thing that separates true leaders.

**What was your first job and is there something you learned there that you still use in your work today?**

Life guarding while in high school—pay attention, stay focused, and take care of people.

**What is a piece of advice that you were given that has impacted your career/life?**

Get comfortable with the uncomfortable. One of my favorite professors gave our class a monster project with very little direction and information. We had to figure out how to get all the work done and it was new to all of us. After listening to the class' continual complaints, he asked us, "Do you know why I'm doing this? It's to get you comfortable with the uncomfortable." On his first job, he received an assignment that he didn't know how to do or even where to begin. He wasted a lot of time and struggled moving it forward. He didn't want the same thing to happen to us. So many times in your career and in life, you don't know the answers but you have to keep plugging away and figure it out.

**With all the communication aids available today through technology, what do you think is the biggest communication challenge?**

Focus and purposeful listening.

**What is the one mistake you witness leaders making most frequently?**

Not being able to communicate a clear business strategy. Sometimes it is because the strategy isn't well formulated and needs additional clarification. Other times, the breakdown occurs in the communication of the strategy to the organization. Without a clear strategy and execution plan, decisions often get bubbled up to the top. It slows the empowerment of the organization.

**What steps should leaders take to encourage creative thinking within an organization?**

Incubation of ideas is difficult to achieve in organizations, especially now that most have fewer resources doing the same amount or more work. It's a question of creating time for employees to think about the possibilities. You also can't shoot the messenger when things don't work out. Doing so creates a risk-averse culture and you won't get your best people stretching beyond current boundaries to try new things.

**What are the most effective methods organizations can use to help a new employee understand its culture?**

My favorite method is consistent exposure to senior leadership. Leadership has a golden opportunity early in an employee's career to provide insight into how the company operates, what they expect from their employees, and how they can make a difference. I'm also a big fan of mentoring. Throughout my career, I've had a group of both formal and informal

mentors who have helped me navigate different organizations. I found those relationships and their insights to be a tremendously helpful resource.

**What do you see as social media's effect on the world of business?**

The method of communication and amount of available information is tremendous. Understanding how to navigate it and leverage it will be the challenge for many companies. While companies may struggle with how to leverage social media externally to advance their business, there is a great opportunity to deploy tools and strategies internally. Communication is one of those areas consistently noted as needing improvement. Social media can provide creative ways to solve that problem.

**What is the best business lesson you've learned?**

I have two.

- 1) Don't be afraid of making mistakes. You can't let a fear of failing unduly influence decisions. Your organization will become stagnant.
- 2) Being open and trustful is not a weakness; it is the key to earning the trust and respect of your subordinates. Meaning, you don't always need to have all the answers.

**What is the most frequent question you're asked by clients?**

"How do I grow my business faster?" Answering that question requires digging deep and finding the answers to other questions: Do I understand my customers and their needs? Do I have the right products and services to meet those needs? And, is my organization structured and incented to deliver on those needs? Understanding how you perform within each of those areas gets at the root of growth challenges.

**What do you see as the greatest challenge of business leaders today?**

The speed with which the market place changes. Situations are changing so fast; competition is fierce and moving just as fast as or even faster than you are. Leadership has to be nimble and make decisions quickly yet with enough data that they are good bets. There's a bit of luck in it as well. And then it comes down to your people. We are heading into the Baby bust generation, fewer and fewer qualified people in the workforce. This will make the "people wars" even more intense in the coming years.

**What is your favorite business book and why?**

*Five Temptations of a CEO*. It's about people's nature and understanding the inherent human temptations that create barriers to successful leadership. The lessons are simple ones but can be difficult to maintain on a regular basis.

Amy Ritchie can be contacted at [amy.ritchie@archpointconsulting.com](mailto:amy.ritchie@archpointconsulting.com). The interview was conducted by Jan Risher, Corporate Communications & Public Relations, ArchPoint Consulting, [jan.risher@archpointconsulting.com](mailto:jan.risher@archpointconsulting.com).