

Sneak Peek 2007

Saj-nicole A. Joni on Leadership

Saj-nicole A. Joni 12.24.06, 6:00 AM ET



The Big Trend

The increasing power of networks will continue to create new leadership challenges, opportunities and winners. These networks yield unprecedented individual productivity and will drive the rise and ubiquity of virtual work, flex-time and unimpeded access to the top. Savvy executives now communicate directly, down, up and sideways--and their words and actions are not mitigated by the middle. Many will tell you that this is good for us and creates "balance." Maybe. It can be great, it can be terrible, but it's not about balance. It's about productivity--across all sectors of our lives--work, personal and community service.

The Unconventional Wisdom

Time is precious, and most of us feel stretched to the limit. But even so, American volunteering is at a 30-year high. Why the continuing and dramatic increase? First, from the outpouring of help in the aftermath of Katrina. People in companies all over the country know that their skills are needed everywhere--that they can make a difference, and they are not alone. Second, visionary leaders in the executive suites are proving what they always believed was true--corporate citizenship matters in its own right, and it's a "virtuous circle," driving secondary benefits in employee satisfaction, brand awareness and customer loyalty.

The Misplaced Assumption

Most leaders think that it's important to create a feel-good environment where everyone gets along and is "on the same page." But great leaders need to do more than this. In addition to fostering alignment where it matters, leaders must create a judicious set of tensions that enable people to collectively achieve more than they thought possible. Easier said than done? Absolutely. But it is getting both of these right--enough alignment and enough tension where each matters most -- that separates the merely good from the truly great leaders.

The Watch List

John Connolly -- chief executive and president, Institutional Shareholder Services
Bracken Darrell -- president, Braun
Bridgette Heller -- global president, **Johnson & Johnson** (nyse: [JNJ](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)), Baby Products,
Mary Minnick -- president, marketing, strategy and innovation, Coca-Cola (nyse: [KO](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)),
Sylvia Matthews -- executive director, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Sir Richard Branson -- chairman and chief executive, Virgin Group
Nicholas Negroponte -- founder and chief executive, One Laptop Per Child
Roland Harris III -- general manager, Global Delivery Direct, IBM (nyse: [IBM](#) - [news](#) - [people](#))

The Bold Prediction

Purpose will return to the top of the leadership agenda. Purpose is a powerful unifying force that gives focus in an increasingly chaotic and linked world. It is also a rudder for sustainability as we embrace more conflict, speed and interdependent activity. As people's work causes them to reach across boundaries of time, space and function, informal links between people (in person and electronic) are becoming increasingly powerful. These informal connections will soon surpass traditional reporting structures for getting extraordinary results. Innovative leaders will increasingly rely on informal organization and "lead horizontally" to get things done.