

How CEOs overcome being stuck in the weeds

myvistage.com/research-center/business-leadership/20210614-stuck-in-the-weeds

June 14, 2021



When CEOs get stuck in the weeds—giving their attention to too many issues at once—it's often difficult to find their way out.

Many issues vie for the CEO's attention. There's the budget, brand, board, employees, executive team, plans for the future, and dozens of other details. Taken together, they can overwhelm CEOs, leaving them feeling like they're surrounded by tall grass with no escape.

When CEOs find themselves stuck in the weeds they may run into the common problems outlined below — but not to worry, there are also four reliable ways to clear the field and lead the way forward how you envision.

Problems that occur when a CEO is stuck in the weeds

There are myriad problems for CEOs getting stuck in the weeds, including:

They become micromanagers.

When CEOs get too busy, they tend to become bosses vs. leaders. They take control of too many tasks, leaving employees to do their bidding.

Sometimes, busy executives believe that they know every problem and every solution. Not only is this a faulty assumption, it's incredibly time-consuming for the CEO, leads to micromanagement and tends to drive away talented employees.

The team's growth is stunted.

Over-busy CEOs tend to elect themselves as both captain and crew of the company, believing that they can do everything. But a team will likely not grow if it does one person's bidding or watches as others do all the work.

While CEOs may sometimes be the best person for every job—they became the top dog for a reason—the best CEOs have talented employees who can make their job easier.

Stress.

Steve Tappin, author of the book "The Secrets of CEOs," interviewed 150 CEOs for his book and found something troubling: The major emotions of the average CEO are irritation, overwhelm, frustration and disappointment.

These categories can all neatly fit into one category: Stress.

"There should be a health warning," Tappin told CNN. "If you have those emotions for 80 percent of the day, they lead to stress and cortisol in the body, which leads to accelerated ageing, heart attacks and cancer."

Loss of focus on what matters.

When CEOs get stuck in the weeds, they lose the ability to consider the big picture. This is a huge problem. After all, how can a CEO possibly make decisions for the future when they're so bogged down in the details of today?

Consider this: In 1956, Harvard psychologist George A. Miller wrote "The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our Capacity for Processing Information," one of the most highly cited papers in the history of psychology. The paper found that humans can usually only focus on five to nine things at once. Since this paper was published, other researchers have found that the magic number may actually be lower.

How does a CEO overcome being stuck in the weeds?

While it's difficult for CEOs to refine their focus and get out of the weeds, it's not impossible. Here are four ways that CEOs can rise out of the weeds.

1. Develop the team

Employee development and executive team [leadership development](#) is the most important thing a CEO can do.

When a CEO trusts that their employees are competent and can handle tough issues, they'll be less likely to try to become the do-it-all CEO. Instead, they can trust the people who work for them and take on fewer tasks, allowing themselves to focus on the big picture.

2. Delegate tasks

Delegating tasks will be a learning experience for most CEOs currently stuck in the weeds.

Robert Moylan, CEO and cofounder of Shefit, [told Inc.com](#) that he had been delegating tasks to an employee. When that employee left, he found out that none of their tasks were completed.

From this experience, Moylan learned to vet talent for being accountable and following through on tasks. "You don't wish for something like that to happen, but it made me a better delegator and wound up being pivotal to the company's growth," Moylan said.

And that's what happens when you delegate: You learn, both about yourself as a leader and about your employees. Delegating may have some pain points—especially for CEOs who believe they can do the job best—but it will pay huge dividends.

3. Trust your executive team

A great executive team sets the tone for the company, but it also sets the tone for the CEO.

A [McKinsey & Company report](#) found that executives working with a high-performing executive team are five-times more productive than executives working with an average team.

Executives must be sure that they've built a team they can trust, one that can perform well during good and bad times. Then, much like they've done with other employees, they must be willing to delegate tasks to their executive team, allowing them to lead in their areas of expertise.

4. Overcome fear of failure

Bruce Lee, the famed martial artist and actor, once said that people shouldn't fear failure. Instead, they should fear what will happen if they aim low, which he said is a much bigger error than failure. "In great attempts, it is glorious even to fail," Lee said.

This isn't to say that CEOs should hope for failure. Quite the contrary—when they delegate, when they coach their team, when they build their executive team, CEOs are aiming for big success.

Aiming high will allow CEOs to learn from failure, the secret of great CEOs and successful people. When they fail at any point along this journey, they learn.

If they find they were delegating incorrectly, they can improve how they delegate. If they have been providing the wrong training to their team, they can train them differently. And if they have let the wrong person onto their executive team, they can correct that by finding someone else.

When CEOs go for success and fail, they're still further than they'd be if they never tried at all. They're much closer to tending to the weeds rather than being stuck among them.

43 views

Vistage facilitates confidential peer advisory groups for CEOs and other senior leaders, focusing on solving challenges, accelerating growth and improving business performance.

~~Vistage member~~ companies grow 2.2x fa...

[Learn More](#)