

## **CEO Tip January 2014 – The CEO—Autonomous or Externally Controlled?**

by Guido Quelle

Apart from hearing time and time again that CEOs, in particular, often spend up to 40 percent of their time protecting their own position—because once again someone is boycotting, torpedoing or simply rejecting an initiative, or because someone wants their job, or because someone just wants to cause trouble—I also repeatedly hear from CEOs that they are externally controlled. Schedules fill up rapidly and there's hardly time to catch their breath, let alone think. Everyone wants something, and everything becomes important, because everyone knows: The CEO only has time for the important matters.

Caution is called for here, because the real value of a CEO doesn't consist in making decisions that others would be better qualified to make. It isn't in pushing through senseless compliance regulations within the company, and it certainly isn't in focusing on day-to-day business. The real value of a good CEO lies in thinking things out, in expanding the company's horizons and ensuring that it ventures into new areas. In order for this to happen, they need to get the top management on board to avoid "not invented here" situations, but, above all, they need to invest time.

I am—not just in principle, but also through my work with several dozen managers, board members and entrepreneurs—convinced that the degree of autonomy, power over the appointment book and freedom to act can be dramatically increased for virtually any CEO. You have to take part in a routine meeting? Why? The first question after, "Is a meeting necessary?" is, "Do I have to attend?" The answer is, often enough, "No." Does the appointment book have to be so full, usually with no real breaks to let you catch your breath? No.

If you get the feeling that you're being controlled, bear in mind that you are the one who allows it to happen. There are no actual constraints; we impose our own constraints. If the CEO can't control their own schedule, then who can? You create value when you develop the business, when you discover new talent and make sure that it is encouraged, when you spot business opportunities and sound them out, when you bring together your top team and work with them to develop a binding strategy and accompanying actions.

Set yourself free from the ever-increasing control mania, ignore pointless invitations to meetings, remove appointments from your schedule, discuss with your assistants what is really important, and make sure that you waste your most productive time on unimportant tasks.

Once you do, you will already have taken a big step. Start today.

Prof. Dr. Guido Quelle  
Managing Partner  
Mandat Managementberatung GmbH  
Emil-Figge-Straße 80  
44227 Dortmund  
Germany