

# 10 Leadership Strategies for 2013



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**I**t's a wonderful time to be leading as CMO—assuming you're up to the challenge. As companies face growing pressure to drive growth in this unpredictable environment, marketing is increasingly on your CEO's agenda and, rest assured, it is being hotly debated in the boardroom, as well. Marketing and, specifically, the CMO are leading many of the most important initiatives for companies, whether it's taking the lead on innovation, serving as the voice of the customer to the organization, or investing in social media or digital technologies. I view this as a terrific perch from which to lead, but it is not without its challenges.

Today it is assumed that CMOs know how to ensure that brands and products are relevant to local customers across the global marketplace. They are expected to drive innovation in product development, social media and mobile, and to take the lead in tapping into the unprecedented levels of customer data that are available to drive the development of products and services, all while shaping the overall marketing plan.

Now firmly planted in the C-suite, the best CMOs view themselves as leaders first and marketers second. We believe that this notion is supported by two developments: the changing perception of marketing and the expansion of CMOs' tenures. Our annual tenure study reflects an average tenure for CMOs of 43 months, nearly 18 months longer than just five years ago. Increased tenure means less movement among CMOs, which places

experienced CMOs in high demand, particularly marketing executives with digital expertise. Interestingly, we are also seeing growing demand for digitally savvy marketers in our search work for board directors.

While I would argue that it's never been a better time to lead as CMO, being effective in this expanded role requires CMOs to continually expand their skills as marketers and as inspirational leaders of the organization.

## CMO Resolutions for 2013

As we all take a moment this January to reflect on the past year and begin to set goals for the new year, I offer a few tips for senior marketers, drawing on what I see from the top CMOs and what clients say that they are seeking in progressive marketing leaders.

**1 Get in shape.** As you might expect, the regime of a CMO is demanding, both physically and mentally. It should come as no surprise, then, that the very best CMOs remain disciplined around their health and well-being. Remember that "leading" also means the example that you set, not just what you say. Great leaders continually remind me that they cannot imagine tackling their jobs without their fitness.

**2 Take your CIO to lunch—monthly.** Digital technologies, social media and customer data analytics are changing the rules of marketing. Leveraging the opportunities in these areas requires technology and no one understands your company's infrastructure, capabilities and technology like the chief information (or technology) officer down the hall. There is a reason that they call it "Big Data." You will need a trusted partner to tackle such initiatives, and you are wise to be purposeful in seeking the CIO's counsel and leveraging his or her network.

**3 Develop future leaders.** I find that the best CMOs truly view talent development as "job 1." Today we are seeing more nontraditional routes to the CMO role. Sophisticated companies like Target and Best Buy, for example, have recently installed relatively young, charismatic leaders with diverse backgrounds in their top marketing posts.

You need to think about not only how you staff your team, but also how you can nurture and train tomorrow's leaders. Consider that your young digital staff might require different skills and coaching than yesterday's traditional CPG brand marketers; they likely know significantly more about digital than the most senior members of your team but may have less experience leading teams and managing a business. Find ways to give them leadership experience and exposure to the P&L; give them assignments that require them to collaborate and influence other departments, or encourage them to gain experience outside work, such as by serving on a nonprofit board or committee.

**4 Reignite the flame with agency partners.** The new year is a great time to think about how you might take a fresh approach with your agency partners. They would welcome it, too! When was the last time you brought your agencies in to do an idea session focused exclusively on growing the business? Importantly, do this without delving into the typical daily issues.

**5 Surprise your staff.** I don't know of a company in which the people aren't working harder than they ever have before. As the leader of a 24/7 team, you need to be the one to say: "Hey, thanks. Let's take a moment to reflect on our successes and celebrate." Surprise your team with something fun and different that acknowledges recent accomplishments. Recall that people typically change jobs because of their bosses, not the company. You need to continually work hard to be the kind of leader that people aspire to follow.

**6 Continually seek out unlikely external partnerships.** This is not the time to go it alone. Today's top companies are taking advantage of new and innovative partnerships to make a big impact with customers. Which companies could add value to your company's business or marketing efforts? Building your personal network has always been important, but you should be overt in your outreach and continually consider how different companies could be symbiotic partners. January is a great month to lob some of those calls that you have been putting off.

**7 Transform your entire company into marketing evangelists.** As the organization's top marketer, you really do have permission—consider it a mandate—to rally the whole organization behind the latest marketing initiative. Respected CMOs like Bill McDonald at Capital One find venues to share the company's new commercials for the next quarter, firing up the whole company behind the campaign. If you believe, like we do, that your own employee base is becoming the bridge to customers, there's no better group to educate as disciples for your brand.



**8 Try one new thing to encourage creativity in your team.** Excellent ideas can get lost in the shuffle, especially in complex global organizations, so marketing leaders need to find ways to surface the best ideas and develop actionable plans to bring them to fruition. One suggestion for promoting creativity: Take some time to look at old ideas—both the successful ones to consider what might have been done differently and the ones that were never implemented. Some ideas require a gestation period and are improved when they are reexamined.

**9 Don't fly solo when it comes to digital.** Whether it's mobile media, social networking or e-mail marketing, digital's influence reaches across business sectors. The accelerated pace of innovation and change in the digital world can be daunting, and marketers should not be shy when it comes to asking for help. Accomplished CMOs become player/coaches and serve an important educational role internally. Your company will look to you to be the expert. To be prepared, leverage an external brain trust, including many of your peers who are facing the same dilemma.

**10 Don't do. Lead.** I know that it is tempting for creative marketers to get involved in the smallest details of the marketing plan, but remember that part of leading a thriving, engaged marketing team means letting them do their jobs. As a senior leader, you're there to provide visionary leadership and build morale. In 2013, try to spend at least 50% of your time "leading." You just might find that your team's output will put you in a better place. **m**

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To read Welch's previous *Marketing News* column, "Getting Smart About Digital: How Old Dogs Can Learn New Tricks," go to [MarketingPower.com/marketingnews](http://MarketingPower.com/marketingnews).