

Q&A with Bill Johnson

Chairman, President, and CEO, H.J. Heinz Company

Why did you commission the study?

One of corporate America's greatest responsibilities is developing and preparing future CEOs, whether for smaller sized companies or future global business leaders. Many people may not realize that one of the things that is often standard to the job of the CEO is to enact a plan for eventual CEO succession. This is an ongoing process that takes a number of years and encompasses evaluation, development, and planning. I commissioned this study because I realized that one crucial voice was missing in the conversation about what makes a great CEO—the CEOs' voices themselves.

How do you envision the book will be used in business management?

What makes PREPARING CEOs FOR SUCCESS both unique and useful is the candor of the participating CEOs who each day drive billion dollar companies. It contains straightforward advice that illustrates the honest experience of sitting CEOs so that people will come away with knowledge that will help them move forward as leaders. The book is essentially a guide for what it takes personally and professionally to lead, manage, and grow an organization. Part of being a business leader is to create successors who will generate sustained value for all our stakeholders, everyone from shareholders to employees and customers, to the communities who rely on our facilities for economic prosperity.

Is there something you've learned that you didn't expect to during the creation of the study?

I learned that CEOs often feel isolated on the job because people start treating them differently and stop sharing candid information with them. Strong CEOs combat this problem by opening the lines of communication and reinforcing the need for candor and honest feedback, not just from people within the organization, but also from trusted advisors outside the Company.

What has been the most rewarding thing about being a global CEO?

The greatest reward continues to be developing and mentoring strong leaders within our organization who will drive the future growth and success of our businesses and brands at Heinz while maintaining the company's commitment to quality, innovation and integrity. I'm very proud of the leaders we've developed within our company, and hope PREPARING CEOs FOR SUCCESS will go a long way towards helping other future CEOs and business leaders.