

"For an entrepreneur, reality is more important."

DR. STEPHEN LONG, RENOWNED LEADERSHIP COACH TO *FORTUNE* 500 COMPANIES AND NFL TEAMS AND A FORMER TRAINER AT THE US AIR FORCE ACADEMY TALKS TO **STEVEN PHILIP WARNER**, ABOUT EVENTS THAT SHAPED HIS LIFE AND ON VARIOUS ASPECTS OF LEADERSHIP AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP.

Once a college football coach at the University of Virginia and the University of Delaware, Dr. Stephen Long is today teaching performance enhancement lessons to top management of organisations across the world. He is the Founder President of The Institute for Level Six Leadership. As per a recent study by the University of Utah, Dr. Long was identified as one of North America's top-10 performance enhancement consultants. Currently, he is a highly sought after speaker by *Fortune 500* companies, and even athletic outfits (which include 21 NFL teams, Olympians, All-American and all-conference athletes, Heisman Trophy finalists, et al). Not surprising, considering that for six long years, he was the Performance Enhancement Specialist at the US Air Force Academy. Even today, programs designed by him are used for coaching those in the Cadet Wing. Dr. Long believes that leadership is a learned skill that can be gained through hard work and strong sense of determination. Author of the best-selling book, *GOLD! Applying Level Six Performance to Capture the Runaway American Dream*, his coaching techniques are known around the world as Level Six Leadership techniques. In an interview with *DTDIY*, he talks about his thoughts on leadership and how leaders and companies can work towards becoming bigger and more successful.

Q. More than 1,000 coaching assignments across global corporations – obviously you have interacted with many 'multi-tasking' senior managers over the years. During times when multi-tasking is a hard pressing reality, how does a leader choose between tasks?

A. It really boils down to just one thing – prioritising. People are not born with time management skills. They develop it. Even leaders make the mistake of surrendering to situations. In today's competitive landscape, you can't afford that. If you want to avoid getting stuck in problems that do not fetch you anything at the end of the day, then start planning. Segregate what ever you have on your plate based on relative importance. At a given time, you can't really have six tasks that are equally important. And if you do come across such a situation, it is better to accept

that you were not prepared. Leading a disciplined life is not really about strategising too much. Its actually about simplifying everything.

Q. So how does this leadership coach – you – prioritise his tasks?

A. I just wake up early in the morning and hit work. I'm always excited about my tasks for the day ahead. It's not really important what you do but what is more important is that you enjoy it. I get my hands on the most challenging assignments for the day and finish them first. Look, "satisfaction" is most important for any entrepreneur, leader or even any employee in an organisation to give his best.

Q. So you believe that "satisfaction" is the best first step towards achieving positive change at an organisational and a personal level?

A. It is. It's extremely important that all employees and even CEOs are satisfied at work. If they are not, nothing will change. An organisation is not a place which is designed to give you satisfaction by default. So if you are not happy with the way things turn up at the workplace, you must attempt to reassess your priorities. Given that our lifestyle, personal and organisational aspirations have become intrinsically linked, it is important to first identify what you want to do in order to move in the direction of positive change. And this is as true for a sales manager as

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much as it is for the CEO of the company.

Q. Some leaders find it difficult to balance their work and personal life. Some imagine it does not exist. What is your opinion?

A. To be honest, I don't really consider them different. My personal and professional life are part of the same ecosystem which is my immediate reality. They don't move away from each other. The way I see it, they reabsorb each other. The presence of my family gives me the strength to start my day every morning on a positive note. Problems develop when you start presuming that your personal and professional cannot co-exist together. That's when you develop and negative mindset. It's all about perspectives. And every successful CEO whom I would have trained or interacted with agrees more or less with living the two lives together.

Q. You were a field coach till you turned 40. How did the change to becoming a business coach happen?

A. Sports was my passion. Then change had to occur. And I am glad it happened. I started my business relatively late in life. Everything I did before 40 added up and helped me tremendously in my business. I started my career as a college football coach. Being a football coach is a very high profile and visible job. The job taught me the art of maintaining a public persona. It taught me how to be the same person in public. My life was very stable and I enjoyed my job. Things changed diametrically when I and my wife got married. She soon landed up in one of the top B-schools in US. Her educational opportunity was simply phenomenal and I realised that I had to give up football coaching if I was to make life more meaningful for both of us. I did it.

Q. It was not easy as you make it sound. Or was it?

A. Oh no. It wasn't. That was a really difficult time as I had to decide my future course of action. I did have challenges. But when I look back today, I realise that I would have never become a leadership coach had I not taken up the opportunities that came my way. Actually, much later did I realise that I had developed into an educator during my very days as a field coach.

Q. If you were to give a quick advice to someone who is trying to discover the diamond in himself. What would you say?

A. That's pretty simple – do what you are passionate about do it with pride. Become a plumber but fix the pipes perfectly. And most importantly, be very sincere and work very hard. That is most important to achieve success.

Q. You are a consultant to Fortune 500 CEOs. What are the most common problems that they come up to you with?

A. The most common problems are related to execution of strategies. Companies around the world have started putting a lot of emphasis on strategy. Everyone is looking for a perfect strategy. But the problem is that once everything is perfectly planned out, people have a hard time executing it. So my plain vanilla advice to the CEOs that I have worked with has been that no strategy needs to be perfect. It just needs to be sound. What happens when the strategy is perfect but difficult to execute, is that many leaders and team members get frustrated and give up thinking. Now, that is dangerous.

Q. Many claim that positive thinking is everything for an entrepreneur? Do you agree?

A. Positive thinking goes a long way. But for an entrepreneur, reality is more important. Consider a glass of water. A lot of people will see it as half empty. And a lot again would see it as half full. Either ways, you put yourself in a distinct mindset. It's very important to understand the reality of the situation and develop a positive attitude. A successful entrepreneur is one who can take calculated risks by assessing the odds of success.

Q. Just asking – what according to you differentiates a Zuckerberg from a Jobs?

A. I don't really know what differentiates Zuckerberg from Jobs, but it is highly likely that they have more in common than different!

Q. What besides money and fame, have you seen entrepreneurs being motivated by?

A. Self esteem, and of course creating something new – something that will make them remembered. It's a different high, you know.

Q. Leaders who fail – they blame external events. What is your opinion?

A. My research shows that 84% of leaders who do not succeed create roadblocks themselves. Beyond knowing what you want, it is important to have a passion for whatever you do. It really comes down to the leader empowering his workforce to achieve extraordinary feats.

Q. A true leader is someone who is...?

A. ...who is easy to identify and has followers. It doesn't matter which organisation and in what hierarchy you find such individuals, you simply spot them with a lot of followers. Leaders are those who are able to manage themselves in times of success and failure. They are able to foster relationships which are important for their personal & professional success.

