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Growing Beyond Spreadsheet Leadership

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Cisco Chief Technology and Strategy Officer Padmasree Warrior encourages students and aspiring entrepreneurs to become authentic leaders. As opposed to leading purely through analytics and command and control, Warrior explains why the leaders of tomorrow need to skilled in persuasion and community building.

Transcript

So I think if you kind of look at leaders for the past 10 years or so and actually I give talks at business schools too and I sometimes blame them for creating spreadsheet driven leadership models where we are actually looking at spreadsheets and making decisions on to make investments or not make investment.. We do that too all the time, but that model is changing where now leaders are expected to have the human element and be approachable and have authenticity makes a huge difference whether you are attracting people to recruit them to work with you or actually creating a work environment where people feel they can contribute a lot.. So this is something I firmly believe in and I think more and more leaders who are successful have to be both analytical but also empathetic and so I think that is really - the danger is when we use technology and we can automate everything and I just talked about how internet of everything can do all of the analytics and tell us how to make better decision.. We still kind of have to have the authenticity in leadership that's going to be important.. The second I think big shift that's happening is leaders now no longer get to dictate or tell the groups that they are leading what needs to be done.. I think decision making is still an important attribute but along with that, sharing experiences and making - coming collectively to decisions is really becoming important.. And that doesn't mean just your team by the way.. I actually use Twitter quite a bit and I use Twitter to test ideas sometimes.. It's not necessarily from my own group.. I talk about the internet of everything and I'll post something and I'll see how many people are responding to it and what the general feedback is to that..

And so there is an engagement model and how you engage people in a broader sense.. I think influence is a big aspect of leadership in addition to just making decisions.. So I think having an influence platform and social media can really help in this but actually being able to use that is effectively as a leader is extremely important going forward.. And the third I think big shift is leaders in the future have to be really more about being community builders and what do I mean by that.. So I grew up in India.. So I belong to a community of Americans from India, right? So I lived here a long time but there is and I went to IIT in India so there is an IIT Alumni Association that I belong to.. I went to graduate school at Cornell.. So I have a Cornell community that I belong to.. I am a woman engineer so I have a community of women in tech that I belong to and of course I have a community of Cisco people that I belong to.. I speak at lots of universities so I have lots of people from university startups, etcetera..

So you as an individual belong to many different communities.. How do you balance when to share something that you got from one community with another or not? And so this leads into lots of complicated discussions about privacy.. Do you use the information somebody puts on a social website in the interview process or not? You know you belong to both communities.. So I think this whole topic about privacy and what is - what you can share and how as a leader you deal with belonging to multiple communities is going to be extremely important as well.. Going forward and leaders in the past really didn't have to deal with that.. Now of course you have an option not to participate in any of that as a leader, right? People asked me why are you on Twitter? Aren't you afraid that you'll say something? Because although I say this is my personal platform, people read whatever I post as the CTO of Cisco said.. So you can never confuse the two.. There is no such thing as this is my personal platform, this is my work platform.. They do blend, right? So I can choose not to be on it, but then I am losing out as a leader to have a broader sphere of influence which is not good.. I need to have that broad sphere of influence..

So knowing really how to deal with that is a very subtle but complex skill in leadership that people need to develop going forward...