

CEO View**How do you learn what you need to know to keep pace with your employees and competitors?**

In conjunction with the Alliance of Chief Executives in Walnut Creek, the Business Times regularly meets with CEOs to discuss the state of business in the East Bay. Here are excerpts from those roundtable discussions.



David Mosby
CEO
InterWorks Software
Concord

"One of the most important things I do is participate in the Alliance of Chief Executives. The diversity of people who show up at these meetings and the diversity of the meetings themselves, help provide insights to me about what is going on in industries that are completely unrelated to what I do every day. And that different perspective has always proven to be useful."



O. Fabomi Ojola
President
CrestPoint Solutions
Pleasanton

"Learning for me is a continuous job. No matter what it is, I stay open-minded. I align myself with people with more knowledge than myself. In my organization, there are many people who look up to me for the answer. I didn't get to be a CEO by being a dummy. I got where I am by learning from people around me and by never giving up learning. I continue to stick my head in different parts of the business. I am one of those walk-around CEOs. I go in and talk to my programmers, technicians and try to learn a little bit of what everyone is doing. I'm a firm believer in seminars and workshops. I have never met a salesperson that I didn't learn from. They always have a unique way of positioning a product."



Dean Wilson
President
Employment Research
Services, Dublin

"My organization is very small. We are about five people and I came into the organization about a year and a half ago. We

do pre-employment screening, drug testing, credit reporting and we basically have to train everybody to a standard because it's such a specialized industry. There are very few people walking around with a knowledge base.

So I have had to sit down with law books and translate them verbatim and then translate that into practicality through conversations with attorneys, industry experts and peers as other providers of industry services and really being able to sympathize that to a level to where somebody that you are bringing off the street with good office skills and allowing them to transfer that knowledge in a short period. We are not a 500-person company where we can have an 8-week training course. We hire them because we have a need, because someone has left.

Employment law is always being tinkered with. I have to read legislative bulletins on various proposed laws. I go through HR magazines and publications.

We are always looking for experts from various states because they each have a different view of the world of what an employee's right to information is, versus an employer's right."



Sudhir Aggarwal
Managing Director
Copia Associates
San Ramon

"We look for companies that are involved in either turn-around situations or rapid growth situations that are providing capital and management expertise to help them through their change times.

As far as learning goes, the challenge that the CEO finds is that there is very little time. It's learning on the fly. Gaining knowledge. When I look at how I pick up knowledge, it's talking to professionals very often.

There is no way we can be experts on everything. It's the job of the CEO to understand patterns of behavior, much like a doctor who understands patterns of behavior and bodily function. Through those patterns, they can identify if there's something wrong or not wrong.

Largely that's what a good CEO does, unless he has been in the business a long

time, he can almost learn the functional areas that he is overseeing. And it's identifying the knowledge pool because within the organization there are some very talented people. And the other way is reading. I have a box where I throw articles. The third way is through personal life: through your wife, kids, parents. The CEO becomes very effective at the art of gathering information through others."



Marty Flynn
President
Credit Communications
San Ramon

"Basically what I am seeking are perspectives, which can be offered through groups like the Alliance, or trade associations because I don't have the time to do it myself. Seeking the perspectives of other CEOs or colleagues within my industry is what allows me to gather the information that I need. Being a small company, you have to rely on people within the organization and people outside your organizations to help frame your long-term vision and what direction you see your company going in."



Paul Witkay
Founder & CEO
Alliance of Chief Executives
Walnut Creek

"One of my first members when I founded the Alliance nine years ago said to me: 'CEOs love to learn, but hate to be taught.' They do need to spend their time gathering information from others. I love to be with people that are smarter than me and everybody in the Alliance is smarter than me and I have the opportunity to learn every day. I am very privileged every day. Reading the right trade journals and going to the right seminars. The good CEO, as far as getting creative ideas, that's when they look for the diversity of ideas out in the world. They understand they can learn from anybody."