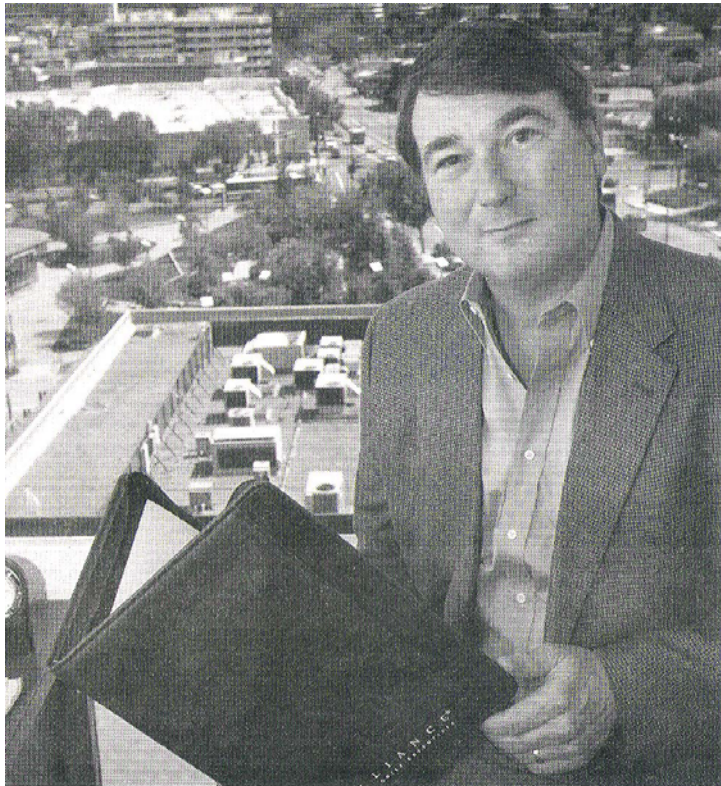


Upclose

Paul Witkay - CEOs are his business

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BY [Katy Lieber](#)



After 10 years of working with Bay Area company heads as the founder and CEO of The Alliance of Chief Executives LLC, Paul Witkay says that a good CEO always credits his team.

Witkay is no different and credits the members of his Walnut Creek organization, founded in 1996, with helping the group reach its 10th year.

"We bring CEOs together in an environment where they can talk about their most sensitive strategic issues with other CEOs," Witkay said.

He started the alliance after being inspired by an organization of health care industry CEOs that he joined while running a subsidiary of [Air Liquide Corp.](#) He was hooked after the first meeting.

"There were eight guys sitting around the table and they were all smarter than me," he said. "I literally fell in love with it. It was so powerful and so stimulating."

The alliance has grown to 22 groups, about 220 members, and is solely supported by membership dues.

Business philosophy: Really know your customers and your market. Know them deeply and provide a product or service that is significantly better than anyone else's.

Key to longevity: It's all about the members. Frankly, I'm in debt to the first members of the alliance; they established a culture. They engaged in deep, meaningful, strategic discussions with a spirit of openness and honesty and they really asked each other how they can help each other. They came with the right attitude of "What can we learn from each other and how can we help each other?" but kept it at a very, very high level.

Secrets of a successful CEO: Vision. They really have to have a clear vision of where they are going and be able to communicate it. Passion. They really have to have energy and want to do this. Integrity. They really have to walk the talk; it's all about gathering the best team. Humility. The most successful CEOs really are humble people and realize how little they know and would like to know everything about everything. They are total learners and they really value everyone else on their team.

Popular discussion topics: The role of a CEO can be somewhat schizophrenic. They have to have a clear vision of where they are going as well as be an optimist. At the same time, they are constantly questioning themselves, asking if they are doing the right thing while scanning for new opportunities and are really paranoid that they could have missed something.

Role models: I'm a big fan of those who have changed entire industries. Herb Kelleher with Southwest, Howard Schultz with [Starbucks](#), Bill Gates at [Microsoft](#), Andy Grove at [Intel](#). Any folks like that.

Person most interested in meeting: Any of the people I just mentioned.

Guilty pleasure: We don't get to very often, but we like to visit the various wine tasting regions.

Favorite book: Patrick Lencioni's "The Five Temptations of a CEO," and "Good to Great" by Jim Collins.

Favorite restaurants: [Left Bank](#), Postino's.

Favorite movies: "Cool Hand Luke," "To Kill a Mockingbird."

Choice for another career: I can't think of anything else I'd rather be doing.
Paul Witkay

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