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Ricardo Levy unveils the universal qualities of entrepreneurs, page 5.

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U.S. 1

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U.S.1 SURVIVAL GUIDE

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Wednesday, October 26

The Qualities of Leaders and Entrepreneurs

Just about any book on leadership will ask the question “Are leaders made or born?” Ricardo Levy, on the other hand, almost doesn’t care. For Levy, a chemical industry entrepreneur, author, and speaker, the secret ingredient in success is the same mom put in her apple pies — love.

“You have to be absolutely committed to an idea,” Levy says. “And not just an intellectual commitment. It’s more important that the dream grabs you than being good at particular tasks.”

Levy will discuss on “The Essence of Entrepreneurship” on Wednesday, October 26, at 4:30 p.m. at the Friend Center at Princeton University. The event is free. Call 609-258-3979.

For Levy, the total commitment to an idea and a dream is the heartbeat of any entrepreneurial exercise. Once captivated, he says, a person’s internal energy propels him forward like an engine. You will gladly deal with the downs and the demands because under it all, you’re in love.

And love is contagious — which is a good thing if you are looking to build a company

that employs more than just yourself. Just be careful when it comes to finding people who think like you do.

“You want to find people who complement you, not think like you do,” Levy says. “You want them to be excited like you, which is different from thinking like you.” Similar thinking leads to groupthink, meaning that critical ideas do not get considered as thoroughly as they should. Excitement, on the other hand, gets people thinking in all kinds of ways, Levy says. Excitement generates excitement and ideas. The question is how to generate it when you’re the leader.

Shall we dance? To be a good entrepreneur is to be as nimble as you are diversified, Levy says. A good entrepreneur is part storyteller, part dancer, and part lover.

Business, Levy says, requires communication. The better communicator you are to the people around you — colleagues, employees, angels, or whomever — the more engaged people will be. If you can explain your vision in a way that captures their imagination, that allows them to feel what you feel, and to place themselves in your position, he says, those around you will do more than just phone in what they think you want. They will share your goals and vision and work to make it a reality.

But a good entrepreneur needs to be a dancer too — swift and flexible and able to adapt to whatever comes along. That includes new trends. Levy says that a good entrepreneur and leader is able to embrace trends and technologies — and to discard them if need be.

The lover concept refers back to passion. “You need to be passionate enough so that people fall in love with your idea,” he says. “You need to connect with people on an emotional level.”

Trust me. One of the things you need to be a leader or an entrepreneur, Levy says, is the ability to build trust among others. And even in this technologically advanced age, trust is built the old-fashioned way — by your actions. Consistent, strong, ethical actions go a lot further than talk.

Continued on following page

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This is related to being a good dancer — only in a troupe. Leaders respond and act, Levy says, but good teams are those that trust each other and their leaders. They know what the objective is and each member of the team will work to make sure the goal is reached, rather than try to grab for personal glory.

The nebulous concept of integrity, Levy admits, is hard to define. We hear the word all the time and most of us know generally what it means. But Levy says it's a hard word to connect people to. Putting into tangible terms means leading by actions.

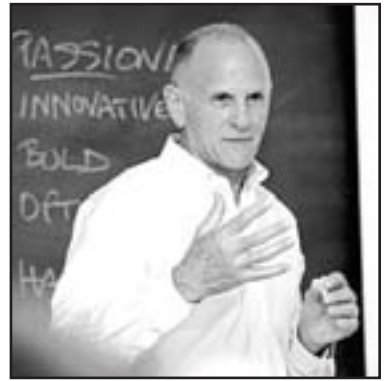
Lack of trust, by the way, is a major reason companies fail. "If you don't have trust you're going to waste a lot of time worrying about issues that shouldn't be issues," Levy says. Issues such as trying to figure out people's motives. Energy spent on something like this erodes trust and, consequently, teams, sections, and, finally, whole companies. "It's not the reason they all fail, but trust is paramount," he says.

Actually, trust in business is a lot like trust in marriage, Levy says. It's a lesson 47 years of marriage has taught him — that trust, openness, and respect solve a lot more problems than worry and selfishness. When mistakes are made in a trusting relationship, he says, "bring them forward. It's ridiculous to think of it as anything other than a partnership."

Levy credits his wife, Noella, an occupational therapist, with much of his success as an entrepreneur. Levy says it is Noella's support for him — and her stable personality — that allowed him to pursue his own dreams in business. "She's my stable anchor," he says. "She dedicated herself to raising our family. I could not imagine how I could have built companies without that stability at home." He also maintains that were Noella hesitant, he would likely never have made the entrepreneurial leap.

The leap came when Levy was working as a scientist at the Exxon Research Center in Linden in the 1970s. A stable, steady job with a comfortable paycheck greeted him every week, yet he decided it was time to put his knowledge to use for

Heart and Soul: Ricardo Levy says leaders and entrepreneurs share similar attitudes and drives.



himself. Pretty much everyone thought he was crazy — even his parents who owned their own business back in South America, and his brother who owned his own business there too.

But Noella, a native of Honolulu, believed in him. His final push came from a relative who had survived a Nazi concentration camp. He told Levy that if you have a dream, chase it down. Levy left Exxon in 1974 to found Catalytica, a chemical company based in California, that in 2000 was acquired by Dutch chemical company DSM.

Levy's parents were lucky enough to escape Germany for South America in the 1930s. Levy came to America to study at Stanford and Princeton before returning to South America to run his family's business. In 1969 he sold the business and went back to Stan-

ford to get his Ph.D. in chemical engineering in 1972.

Given that his wife's support was so critical to his success, you might think that single entrepreneurs

would have a harder time. Not necessarily, though, Levy says. For one, an unsupportive spouse is a serious issue. But moreover, he says, strong relationships with people who will support your endeavors is the key ingredient, not marriage itself.

"You need candid people who can be your sounding board," Levy says. Not to mention your barometer. To build a successful company means cultivating feedback from people you respect, even if they don't work for you. Solid relationships, he says, allow a leader to hear important ideas that might otherwise never come about.

The sounding board relationship is especially important for leaders of companies because it allows them the very human need to vent. "As a leader you have a particular station that creates particular dynamics," Levy says. "You can't always be open and vulnerable because others depend on you.

But leaders need chances to open their hearts. Building a company can be very lonely."

Levy admits that vulnerability is not something most people embrace — particularly entrepreneurs and leaders who often feel that even private moments of weakness are carcinogenic to their businesses. Levy wonders what would have become of him without Noella to turn to, but he also wonders who he would be if he had not discovered meditation.

"Some people run for five miles, I take a mini-vacation," he says. "It's part of my avenue to disconnect."

If there is one thing Levy wants new and young entrepreneurs to know above all else it is that they need to believe wholly in what they are about to do. And be committed wholly as well. "Make sure you or someone deeply associated with the venture has put in the hours," he says. And he doesn't mean clocking in for long hours, he means someone who has done the kind of thing you're setting out to do.

"A lot of kids today think they can read about something and they're experts, he says. "Experience is not as simple as just reading about it." — **Scott Morgan**

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