THE LEAD
https://theleadpc.com/lead-left-interview-ted-bililies-part-2/

Lead Left Interview – Ted Bililies (Part 2)

THE LEAD | May 9, 2017

This week we continue our conversation with Ted Bililies, Managing Director and Chief Talent Officer for AlixPartners. Ted is a Harvard-trained clinical psychologist with decades of experience in leadership and organization development. Though known originally as a restructuring firm, AlixPartners has grown over the last 35 years into a global consulting firm that specializes in whole company transformation. ***Second of two parts – View part one.***

[wpdm_package id='12239?]

The Lead Left: Ted, tell us a bit about your personal background. How you got to AlixPartners.

Ted Bililies: At Harvard, I was fascinated by high-performance individuals such as athletes and musicians. How they do what they do? Why? In the case of business leaders, how do they persuade and influence others? How do they perpetuate their ideas and values? How do they lead?

In the private equity sector, I saw the very clear correlation between the investment thesis and outcomes. I realized I could have a dramatic impact by focusing on the human element. We have a whole suite of tools to help, and we have a 20 year track record of aligning leaders to get the best outcomes.

TLL: What do you look for to ensure things are progressing?

TB: Does management still understand the motivation of the employees? Have you created enough opportunities for employees to progress in their careers and rise through the organization? Is there a feedback-rich environment? Do you have the right culture to reinforce and retain your talent?

TLL: What about helping CEOs dealing with change? Isn't that a critical ability?

TB: Absolutely. We often enter those conversations through the chair and board level. When there are problems, they will tell us, for example, that the business strategy isn't working. Or our CEO/COO is retiring and we need to plan for succession. It's not just the "positives" that are changing.

We do that kind of work for the board itself, as well. Yes, there are such things as dysfunctional boards. We ask similar questions that we ask of the management teams we work with. Is the board aligned with the firm's goals? Are they aligned with each other? Do they understand their role? Are they adequately self-aware to contribute to a positive culture in the board room and with the management team?

TLL: Ted, I suspect that one of the critical issues that can challenge the best C-suites is M&A.

TB: That's certainly true. Obviously acquisitions present opportunities for a variety of redundancies. It all begins with the business strategy. Why is this acquisition taking place? What are the roles and accountabilities for each of the teams? Only then can you accurately evaluate the talent you have.

It’s also important to understand what kind of culture will survive the merger. Leaders must very consciously be aligned to keep the culture that you want.

TLL: Sometimes the target’s CEO may be the better qualified to lead the resulting combination.

TB: That’s true. We see a certain amount of dysfunctionality all the time during mergers, unfortunately. It helps to have an objective, wise person at the board level to help resolve conflict and guide the CEO to a successful conclusion.

TLL: What’s your typical engagement period at Alix?

TB: Usually three to six months. Our tag line is “When It Really Matters.” I like that a lot. We work quickly, when the circumstances are urgent, and there is no room for failure. We often enter through the board or CEO, and work throughout our client organizations.

TLL: AlixPartners itself has evolved during its history.

TB: We started as a turnaround advisor fifteen years ago. We now work with all kinds of companies at every stage of their growth in holistic turnarounds. For example, we’re working with a retailer where the senior management team needs to be upgraded and colliding cultures from a merger need to be integrated. AlixPartners has some of the best retail management experts in the business.

TLL: It’s also true that CEOs are each good at different things.

TB: Yes. But it all comes down to matching their strengths to the business strategy and supplementing those qualities with other members of the senior management team.

TLL: Ted, what’s the biggest surprise you’ve had over the past few years?

TB: That’s easy, Randy. It’s how mainstream these issues we’ve been discussing with you have become in the board room and executive suite. They’re now sold on the importance of optimizing human capital and aligning talent and leadership with the business strategy. I no longer need to be the evangelist I once was!

Contact: Ted Bililies
tbililies@alixpartners.com