

Ten Attributes Of A Great CEO Peer Group



[Leo Bottary](#) Big Picture July 9, 2019



For three years now, I've had the good fortune to lead dozens of CEO peer groups in an intensive three-hour workshop, where CEO members assess their own performance as a group. As you might expect, the stronger the group, the greater their expectations of one another.

That being said, the areas that need attention, and in some cases improvement, are largely the same. It's for that reason, I want to call out 10 areas that set great CEO groups apart from average ones.

1. **Having the right people in the room** - Members who are a blend of being very different, yet very much the same tend to make for the strongest groups. While they may come from different industries, backgrounds, ethnicities, religions, political parties, etc., they also share common values that tend to drive their beliefs about

what it takes to make a group really gel. They embrace their differences and accept their common humanity.

2. **Being truly committed to their fellow members** - Commitment is a word that comes up over and over again in these workshops. It starts with conversations about members who miss meetings and continues to involve every aspect of the group experience. While all members want personal takeaways, their path to receiving the gifts that come from being part of a group are made possible only when they are willing to give their all to others during each and every meeting (as well as the times in between).
3. **“Leveraging” their safe environment** - Having an environment that is a safe place to share with others that prizes confidentiality (what’s said in the room, stays in the room) is essential, but too many groups confuse HAVING the environment with USING it. Having a swimming pool in your backyard may be great, but if you never swim in it, you’re hardly getting all its benefits. Great groups include members who are unafraid to dive in - head first if necessary.
4. **Being prepared to play** - This is identified time and time again as one of the areas that needs the greatest improvement. At least one CEO in every group I’ve visited will admit that (s)he is less prepared for their CEO peer group meeting than any other meeting on their calendar. They wouldn’t consider sitting down with their board or their staff as ill-prepared as they show up to their monthly group meeting. They then imagine: What if we all showed up ready to play, every meeting? It’s a game changer.
5. **Being relentlessly patient with asking questions** - CEOs tend to be problem solvers. They listen to a situation as described by one of their fellow members and their brain immediately starts concocting solutions. Great groups understand that asking really good questions is the key to unlocking the dialogue. They also realize that providing the right answer to a situation not fully understood, doesn’t help anyone.
6. **Bringing important topics to the conversation** - When I talk with CEOs about the value of their interactions and the takeaways they receive from their conversations, they understand that the burden falls on them. Conversation topics (the issues, problems, opportunities, etc.) will only be as strong as what the members bring to the table. You can’t have valuable interaction if you’re not willing to interact about anything of value. Raising topics for conversation with your peer group is an act of generosity and courage. Great groups have members who consistently exhibit both.
7. **Understanding how to get the most from the group** - Engaged members of excellent groups don’t just bring discussion topics to the meeting, they realize that there is a great deal of intellectual capital in the room that can deliver value in myriad ways. Three effective ways include: 1) Members who ask to have their answers questioned, as opposed to their questions answered. They ask their colleagues to pressure test their decision making. 2) They ask each other, the What if? Questions. What if their business model were disrupted? What if their CFO quit? (Questions relevant to pretty much everyone in the room for strategic conversation. 3) Members who ask the group to serve as a mock audience for an important presentation. Peer input can make a big difference here, both for the presenter and everyone else.

8. **Being willing to challenge one another from a place of caring** - This area goes hand in glove with number 3. Those who are best at truly leveraging their safe environments also create a positive context, where CEOs can challenge each other openly with a full understanding of where it comes from. No drama. Just people who care about one another enough to have the hard conversations.
9. **Accepting personal responsibility for your role** - The best teams in business and in sports have powerful cultures of accountability. The team members play for each other. It's not so much about members holding one another accountable, as it involves each member accepting personal responsibility for what they mean to the group and, as a result, will always bring their A game.
10. **Outstanding leadership** - Whether a group is member-led or professionally facilitated, leadership matters. Leaders who are part of the group, rather than apart from it, set the tone in everything they do. They are there to serve as the group and keep their eyes fixed on all the areas covered here.

If you're a member of a peer advisory group, I invite you to share this article with your fellow members and have a conversation about how well you all perform in the areas identified. Check out where you can get even better, address the issues, and watch the improvement.

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