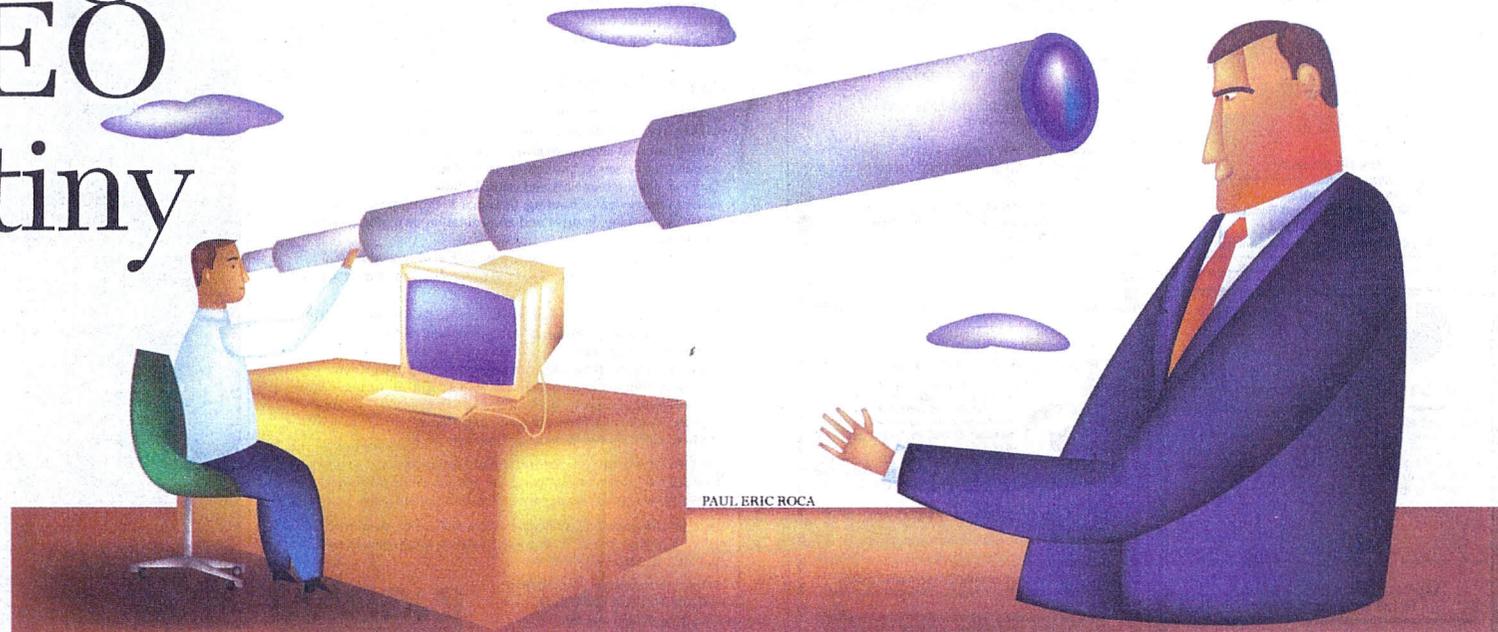


RECRUIT

The Age of CEO Scrutiny

Gone are the days when the boss was always right. Now, his every move is closely watched.



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How important is the reputation of a company's chief executive officer, or CEO, to its image?

More companies are now asking that question, as they ponder the dramatic shake-outs that have taken place in boardrooms around the globe. CEOs have breached ethics, stolen from investors, and manipulated corporate reporting to protect themselves.

Suddenly, the Era of the Celebrity CEO has been followed with a crashing thud by the Age of CEO Scrutiny. Investors, customers, employees, and regulators are all questioning the credibility of corporate leaders.

There was a time when no one believed they had a right to judge the "man in charge".

Those days have gone the way of afternoon tea breaks.

Today, companies acknowledge they are not just competing for market share, they need "mind share" — a higher percentage of customer awareness and better ranking in potential buyers' minds. Respect is a major factor in that calculation.

As a CEO, you must recognise that you are always being judged.

You are the chief ambas-

sador for the organisation. You must constantly be mindful of how your behaviour is perceived by observers.

Good communication is all about focusing on your audience. Put yourself into their shoes and ask what they need to hear. Just as you explain things differently to different people, so must you adapt your style to ensure those you need to reach are able to receive your message.

Here are some examples of how, as a CEO, you must focus with precision on the needs and concerns of your audiences:

- **Messaging:** Retrenchment in your company might be a lot less than your competitor's, but pointing this out to employees who have just lost their jobs is insensitive. Think carefully about what you say.

- **Presence:** You may not feel like attending another glitzy awards dinner, but your presence there reinforces your company's image as a serious member of the business community.

Whether you smile openly at everyone or look weighed down by the world directly affects public perception of your company.

- **Timing:** Your key customers enjoy being treated well, but they are unlikely to feel comfortable if you invite them on an expensive trip during this painful economic downturn.

- **Leadership:** You may feel frustrated that sales are not coming in and want to berate your staff to try harder. But badgering seldom motivates, and you could achieve far more with encouragement.

If you look like you cannot handle the pressure, your staff will know they have even more cause to worry.

- **Perspective:** You may forget about the job when you are at home, but the world never forgets. Inappropriate personal behaviour will hurt your company's image faster than you can say "I was misunderstood".

How carefully you think through your message will directly affect the power of its delivery. That message is not only in the words you speak: Your actions, facial expressions, wardrobe, the company you keep, all play a part in building your, and therefore the company's, image.

Like it or not, the higher you go in the organisation, the more you will become fair game among the "chattering classes".

The image of the CEO and that of the organisation are inextricably linked. CEO scrutiny is here to stay.

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