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We Spoke to William (Bill) Edwards of Edwards Global Services on Being an Effective Leader During Turbulent Times

By Charlie Katz - April 22, 2021



As part of our series about the “Five Things You Need to Be A Highly Effective Leader During Turbulent Times,” we had the pleasure of interviewing Bill Edwards.

William “Bill” Edwards is the CEO of Edwards Global Services, Inc. (EGS). He has developed and trademarked detailed and proven step-by-step processes for international business development based on his extensive background and a 47-year track record of success growing businesses in the Americas, Asia, Europe and the Middle and Near East. With living experience spanning China, the Czech Republic, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Iran, Turkey and the United States, Edwards has directed projects in 68 countries and is known as a guru of global business. He has worked with Fortune 100, INC. 5000 and small companies to identify global market opportunities and drive them forward with the analysis, wisdom, foresight and team strategy required to maximize success and avoid pitfalls.

Thank you so much for your time! I know that you are a very busy person. Our readers would love to “get to know you” a bit better. Can you tell us a bit about your ‘backstory’ and how you got started?

By education I’m an oil and gas explorationist, a technologist. This first career allowed my wife and me to live and work in several countries early on in our lives, which is how we became hooked on doing business in other countries.

Can you share a story about the funniest mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lessons or ‘take aways’ you learned from that?

Perhaps the funniest mistake I made was taking snow skis to Indonesia on my first overseas assignment. The large company I worked for did not pay for the U.S. storage of our belongings, while we were overseas. So, I took my skis with me and they were eventually eaten by termites. The lesson learned was for us to be very careful what we took with us on our next 10 international container moves.

None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who

helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story?

While working 18 years for a Fortune 50 energy company, I had some excellent people I reported to. My favorite one was Harry Jamison. When my team in Alaska had a great result for a major project, he thanked me. I said it was the result of very hard work and luck. But Harry said that to be successful you have to put yourself in the path of luck. That has been my motto for all subsequent companies I have worked with and founded over the years.

Extensive [research](#) suggests that “purpose driven businesses” are more successful in many areas. When your company started, what was its vision, what was its purpose?

Living and working around the world proved to me that businesses need to be highly structured to succeed. And that success is not just a good bottom line, but also creating good jobs for all who work for the business. So, my purpose over the years has been to take excellent businesses into countries where they can create excellent jobs, and as a result raise people and their families up into the middle class — which means a better life for them and their children.

Thank you for all that. Let’s now turn to the main focus of our discussion. Can you share with our readers a story from your own experience about how you lead your team during uncertain or difficult times?

My company, Edwards Global Services, takes proven franchised businesses into other countries. At the start of 2020, EGS were poised to find partners for our clients in about 20 countries. When COVID-19 hit, our clients, whose businesses are consumer faced, pivoted to focusing on their employees in their home country and trying to keep their business afloat. All new investment and development stopped by April 2020 and our monthly revenue dropped significantly. To combat this, we secured both a PPP and EIDL loan, then pivoted to using our global team to monitor what was going on in 30+ countries and started publishing a bi-weekly report on global business, health and travel. We also began to use our team members on the ground around the world to monitor operations of our U.S. clients that already had units open in other countries, but who were unable to visit and see what was going on

during the pandemic in-person. By late August 2020, new development began again and is now roaring due to pent up demand. The EGS team is fully engaged in many countries again and our bi-weekly global business update newsletter will continue to be published.

Did you ever consider giving up? Where did you get the motivation to continue through your challenges? What sustains your drive?

Not so much giving up, as trying to decide if I should do something else with less global risk. But I owed it to my team and clients to find a way to get through the pandemic crisis.

What would you say is the most critical role of a leader during challenging times?

Trying to figure out how to keep your business going, employees safe and healthy and retain clients.

When the future seems so uncertain, what is the best way to boost morale? What can a leader do to inspire, motivate and engage their team?

Look at all the data and figure out a path to future success, look for new ways to do business and keep your team positive and looking toward a better future.

What is the best way to communicate difficult news to one's team and customers?

Personal and frequent communication to understand what everyone is thinking and most concerned about. I talked to all our U.S. clients frequently to learn how their core business was doing and offer advice on the future once we came out of the pandemic, not on how we were doing. It's important to focus on the needs of your team members and clients.

How can a leader make plans when the future is so unpredictable?

Study everything available to learn what is actually happening — in EGS's case in 30+ countries. Shift thorough information sources to see what is real and what is hype to find the trends that impact your

business.

Is there a “number one principle” that can help guide a company through the ups and downs of turbulent times?

Communication, communication, communication.

Can you share 3 or 4 of the most common mistakes you have seen other businesses make during difficult times? What should one keep in mind to avoid that?

1. Be focused internally.
2. Do not research what is going on around you and your business.
3. Do not look for ways to pivot and change the way you are doing business.
4. Stay in the same rut you were in!

Generating new business, increasing your profits, or at least maintaining your financial stability can be challenging during good times, even more so during turbulent times. Can you share some of the strategies you use to keep forging ahead and not lose growth traction during a difficult economy?

Watch your business' cash flow on the daily, communicate with team members constantly and look for ways to grow your business outside the box you were in that fits the new direction economies are taking.

Here is the primary question of our discussion. Based on your experience and success, what are the five most important things a business leader should do to lead effectively during uncertain and turbulent times? Please share a story or an example for each.

Communicate, think outside the box, watch cash flow, look for new trends, pivot to use the assets of the business in new, innovative ways.

Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

Value everyone’s culture as much as you do your own culture, by treating everyone you meet equally. As I have lived and worked in many countries, this has been my secret to success around the world.

How can our readers further follow your work?

I post twice a week to LinkedIn about doing business globally and interesting data from around the world. And EGS’s bi-weekly global business update newsletter can be found at www.geowizard.biz.

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