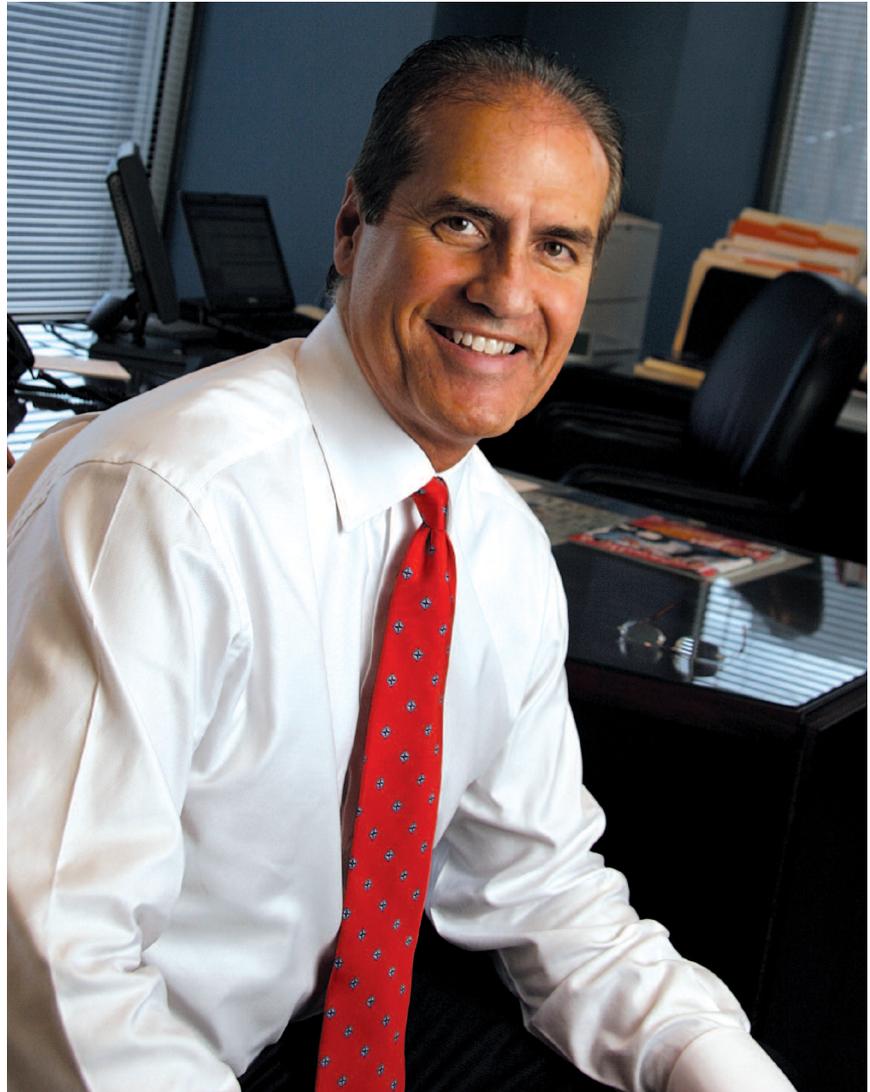


Henry S. Givray

For many, the terms “CEO” and “leader” are interchangeable. This CEO says leadership is not something granted to you by virtue of your title, position, or corner office.



Founded in 1949, Chicago-based SmithBucklin Corporation is the world's largest association management and professional services company. Chairman and CEO Henry S. Givray, 54, worked for the organization from 1983 to 1996 and returned again in 2002 as chief executive officer. He is passionate about leadership, often writing and speaking about it. He holds an M.B.A. from the University of Chicago and both a B.S. and M.E. in operations research from Cornell University.

Who has had the biggest influence on you in your life?

Though an accomplished piano teacher, my mom, Stavroula Givray, has never held a formal position of authority or a management job. However, her instinctive actions and decisions, and the leadership lessons she unknowingly imparted to me, have had a major impact in my life. As I wrote in a *BusinessWeek* essay called “Leadership Lessons from Mom” that was published last year, I was diagnosed with cancer at age 15 and the doctors told my parents

there was little chance I would survive beyond nine months. My father and brother could barely contain their despair and would often cry in front of me, but my mom, always smiling and in good cheer, would continually reference the future. Seeing my mom “up” bolstered my spirits and gave me hope and strength. Without a doubt, Mom’s abiding optimism had a profound impact on my recovery. Years later, I found out that late at night she would go somewhere in the house and break down and weep uncontrollably. Reflecting on Mom’s actions when I was ill, I learned that during trying times, a leader’s courage

INVITED TO LEAD: Henry Givray may be CEO of the world’s largest association management company, but that doesn’t automatically make him a leader. “Leadership is invited and only given by willing followers based on who you are, what you do, and how you do it,” he says.

“While CEOs are measured by quantitative results (to boost sales, improve profit margins, and make money for shareholders), leaders are shaped by character. They inspire and enable others to do excellent work, make valuable contributions, and realize their utmost potential.”

lifts spirits, gives hope, and builds strength in others.

My dad, who recently passed away, was a portrait photographer who had a thirst for knowledge, especially history, that has carried down to me. In fact, several historical figures have become leadership role models for me. Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr., Winston Churchill, and George Washington are my favorites. I am inspired by their courage, perseverance, integrity, and goodness. They overcame incredible odds, offered hope, and showed tremendous self-sacrifice in their service to others.

You’ve said when you were diagnosed with cancer that doctors gave you little chance you would survive. How has that experience influenced your life?

I learned the importance of optimism and how important it is to inspire hope in others. Second, you have to focus on the things you can control, and not on the things you can’t. And third, when one door closes, you must be resilient and find opportunities to open another. For example, prior to becoming ill, I played football, basketball, and baseball. As a result of the surgeries I had and the cobalt radiation treatments I went through, I couldn’t play sports anymore. My outlet became music. I played bass guitar in a rock band called “The Rising Tide,” which — interestingly enough — offered me an early opportunity to develop leadership skills. I was the one who booked the gigs, dealt with the agents, and kept the band together when there was bickering and disagreements. We had gigs nearly every weekend from 1971 through 1975, and I still look back fondly upon those years.

How do you define a successful leader?

Too often, people mistakenly believe that “CEO” and “leader” are synonymous. One does not have to be in a position of authority to become a great leader.

In a recent article I wrote, “When CEOs Aren’t Leaders,” I stated that while CEOs are measured by quantitative results, leaders are shaped and defined by character. CEOs are expected to boost sales, improve profit margins, and make money for shareholders. Leaders set expectations of themselves to inspire and enable others to do excellent work, make valuable contributions, and realize their utmost potential. As a result, they build great, enduring organizations.

How do you see yourself?

It’s not for me to say that I am a leader. Leadership is not something that is bestowed upon you or granted to you by virtue of your title, position, or corner office. Leadership is invited and only given by willing followers based on who you are, what you do, and how you do it. It is revealed and felt by what you inspire and what you enable. So I can only call myself a leader if in fact I have enthusiastic, engaged followers.

How do you as a CEO make sure you are available to your employees?

I believe in not having gatekeepers. I have an open-door policy and I’m accessible to all employees. People are surprised to learn that I answer all of my own phone calls. I also make it a point to always return all of my phone calls and e-mails within 24 hours, no matter what.

What was your first job?

I started bagging groceries at a local supermarket at the age of 13. Fresh out of college, I went to work for Xerox as a special project consultant.

What advice can you give others just starting out in the business world?

Don’t focus a lot of your time and energy chasing money, titles, or position. At any point in your career, ask yourself these questions related to your current situation: Have I grown this past year? Are there continuing opportunities for me to grow as an individual? Am I being stretched? Am I where I can make a difference? Am I working with people who share the same values?

“A network of relationships built and nurtured around trust, respect, confidence, and loyalty is the most valuable professional asset that you can possess. Your opportunities, successes, and fulfillment in the business world are intricately tied to other people’s reactions toward you.”

Answer yes to these questions, and you are on the right path to achieve your professional and personal objectives.

The second piece of advice I would give anyone regardless of where they are in their career is to recognize that a network of relationships built and nurtured around trust, respect, confidence, and loyalty is the most valuable professional asset that you can possess. I say this because your opportunities, successes, and fulfillment in the business world are invariably and intricately tied to other people’s actions, reactions, and decisions toward and about you.

You refer to a network of relationships that you have cultivated over time and which you feel will endure throughout your life. Can you elaborate?

Ultimately, success in developing such a network of relationships is about character, personal performance, and chosen values such as integrity, honor, magnanimity, fairness, courage, and generosity. Over the years I have also learned that there are certain habits and behaviors one can put into action day-to-day that go a long way to building and nurturing your network of relationships. Specifically, I have 20 such guiding principles which I strive hard to practice every day. They include: going out of my way to serve others; always keeping my word no matter what; doing what’s right versus what’s convenient, expedient, popular, or personally beneficial; communicating with clarity, openness, and frankness; defending others whom I know are being unfairly criticized or talked about; surfacing and resolving conflict; developing a reputation for hard work; and demonstrating diplomacy, empathy, and compassion in my dealings with others no matter how difficult.

What is your proudest accomplishment?

For me personally, the transfer of ownership from outsiders to our employees is by far the proudest moment in my career. In June 2005, every one of SmithBucklin’s employees — regardless of position or compensation — was given equal opportunity to acquire ownership in SmithBucklin through the establishment of an Employee Stock Ownership Plan. As a result, SmithBucklin is now 100 percent employee owned. We believe that our people, not outsiders, create value for our clients and our company, and therefore they should be the ones to control the destiny of SmithBucklin and have the opportunity to reap the rewards and experience the fulfillment of ownership.

What is the one thing people would be surprised to learn about you?

I’m a kid at heart. I love to play and imagine. I especially love comic books and super heroes. For me these characters personify service to others, honor, and doing good while doing right.

How do you define success?

On a personal level, I define success by the quality and depth of my relationships, by the impact I’ve had on other people’s lives, and by my willingness and capacity to serve others. Professionally, there’s one true measure of success and that’s SmithBucklin’s achievement and reputation as a great, enduring company. At SmithBucklin, we are passionate and intensely proud of the important and meaningful work we do on behalf of our client organizations. After all, our clients define the purpose of our work and are the lifeblood of our company. We have several measurements of greatness that we are striving to achieve. At the top of our list is creating measurable value for client organizations and earning a reputation of trust, stewardship, and excellence. ■

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To read Henry Givray's articles on leadership published in *BusinessWeek*, go to www.smithbucklin.com.

↔ **Andrea Doyle** is *Convene*'s senior writer.