

# Exploring the leadership style of ursula burns ceo of xerox flashcard



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June 9, 2013 It is rare nowadays for a person to become the top ranking executive at the same company they intern with. Ursula Burns did just that by doing a summer Internship with Xerox Corporation, and going on to become the CEO twenty-nine years later. Ursula Burns was the first African-American woman to be named CEO of a Fortune 500 company, and first woman to succeed another woman as the leader of a Fortune 500 company.

Ms. Burns had very meager beginnings, she was raised by a single mother in a New York City housing project with two siblings. She earned her bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Polytechnic Institute of NYU in 1980, the same year she went to work for Xerox as a summer intern. One year later in 1981, Ursula earned a master's degree of science in Mechanical Engineering from Columbia University, and was hired permanently at Xerox. During the 80s Ms. Burns worked in different roles in product development and planning.

Her career took a turn in 1990, when she was asked to be executive assistant to Wayland Hicks a member of the executive team, initially she did not want to take the position fearing it would be a dead-end job, but later decided to take it anyways and quickly climbed the corporate ladder. In 1991, Ursula became the assistant to Paul Allaire chief executive and chairman. In 1999, she was named vice president of global manufacturing. In 2000, Ms. Burns went on to be named senior vice president. In 2007, she was named the president, and in 2009 went on to succeed Anne Mulcahy as the CEO.

Ursula M. Burns is widely known as a straight shooter, she strongly believes in standing up for what is right and not afraid to say what she believes is wrong. She demonstrated this early in her career while still an intern in 1980, she spoke up at a company meeting, essentially disagreeing with executive Wayland Hicks statement about diversity in the company. Ursula often takes an unconventional approach to solving traditional corporate problems, she is a rational thinker and fearless with taking on innovative initiatives.

Ms. Burns has a "can-do" personality. She believes it is important to lead by example; by setting a high level of greatness at the top of the organization it will trickle down and be reinforced by managers and employees. Ms. Burns describes the culture at Xerox as a culture of possibilities, saying the company believes there is no problem or issues the company cannot undertake and overcome. She says Xerox is not intimidated by a huge problem or opportunity, the culture says yes let's go after that.

Ms. Burns says Xerox can add value to any situation, as they enjoy tackling challenging situations, and revel in the act that things are hard to do. Before Burns became the CEO of Xerox, she played a new ideas when other executives rejected them. Ursula Burns' common sense approach to problem-solving is echoed in the company's policies and guidelines. Specifically under the Ethical Decision-Making Framework, common sense is listed as the number one criteria for determining if a specific behavior is appropriate.

Ursula Burns' mother was very important in laying the foundation of values in morals in her daughter's life. Ursula is often quoted repeating her

mother's advice such as, "Where you are is not who you are" or "Make sure you are giving back more than you are taking from the world". Her mother worked several jobs to take care of Ursula and her two siblings. Ursula's mother had clear expectations for her children, she told them they must be good people and be successful, she would often tell them they have to perform their best and focus on the things they could control.

Ursula is dedicated to mentoring and encouraging young girls and women, her commitment to advocacy is truly remarkable. Ms. Burns believes in accountability at all levels in the organization. She believes in the core values of Xerox, and supports the practice and enforcement of these values. When asked what happens to employees that violate the company's values, Ursula quickly and frankly says these employees are fired even if they are high performing associates. There is little difference between the person Ursula Burns is and how she runs Xerox.

The Core Values of Xerox are stated as: Succeed through satisfied customers; Aspire to deliver quality and excellence in everything they do; Require a premium on assets; Use technology to develop market leadership; Value the employees; and behave responsibly as a corporate citizen. These values are said to be the moral compass by which the company does business with honesty and integrity. Ursula is direct and outspoken in her expectations of the employees of Xerox, her values and ethical beliefs surely resonate with the company. Ms. Burns' beliefs that there are certain standards that have to be met to ensure high performance and integrity.

Clearly communicating the possibilities, setting the agenda and the tone of organization all contribute to the employees holding the values of the company close to heart, and remembering to be ethical in all their behaviors. As the CEO of Xerox Ursula Burns demonstrates many strengths and weakness, some of which stand out more than others. Ms. Burns is very innovative not only in her leadership style, but also in the products and services the company now offers. Last year in 2012, over half of the company's revenue came from IT services.

Xerox's back end technology is now responsible for facilitating purchasing an airline ticket, using EZ Pass, or paying a parking ticket. Commitment to customer satisfaction is another strength Ms. Burns strongly demonstrates. Xerox favors a customer-based approach, in which it is highly important to know what the customer's problems and pain points are. Burns goes on to say innovation is key in solving customer issues, it is important to determine how can technology or innovative process can solve customer problems. Perseverance is arguably Ursula Burns' strongest and most relevant strength.

Ursula persevered her entire life beginning in the housing project she was raised in to becoming the leader of a Fortune 500 company. She has been committed to Xerox for over 30 years, and was key in the turnaround of the company when it was on the brink of bankruptcy. Perseverance is what got her through all of this to where she is today, as the first African-American woman CEO of a successful and innovative before she became the CEO, as the senior vice president of, Corporate Strategic Services, she was responsible for negotiating a contract with the unionized employees.

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This was highly important to the continued success of the company, as she was considering the outsourcing of 2, 000 Jobs. In a normal situation this would have been business as normal for Ms. Burns, however she was home recovering from an emergency hysterectomy. Instead of delaying the proceedings or passing the negotiations off to someone else in the company, she went ahead with the negotiations from her living room. This was a vital occurrence to setting the company on the path of profitability for shareholders and employees alike.

Xerox is known to have a strong culture, and niceness is part of that. “Terminal niceness” is how Ms. Burns describe it. She suggested the company needs to act more like a real family. While one is respectful and civil to their family they can be open in frank with them. In real life situations, when it is important to move quickly, niceness can be indrance by leading to lack of motion and lack of decision making. Ms. Burns took on the chief executive position at an economically depressed time, the worst our generations has experienced.

At the time Ursula took over, the company was facing revenue challenges and they had to offset inefficiencies to ensure sustainability. In her own words Ursula is impatient. However, she has learn to listen to what her people tell her and how to apply that insight to meet the needs and challenges the company faces. Xerox is known as innovative company, as the CEO Ursula Burns lans to focus on aggressive acquisitions of particularly data analytics to help healthcare business worldwide. Burns is extremely collaborative, she wants to make people win.

Ursula believes it is important to have winners in the organizations, instead of losers and winners. Ms. Burns goes on to say it is necessary to have parity in the organization to ensure the best results from the group. She does not want to compartmentalized individuals based on their current internal role. Ursula does want to give everyone equality with discussion and decision that affect the company and employees. Ms. Burns expects the leadership team to think outside the box with communicating and sharing information.

She challenges her people to be more focused on the customer, employees, competitors, and shareholders. Ursula Burns feels a strong responsibility to the community her company serves. She says of her business the end does not always justify the means. The company can get results from doing things the right way, and they can also get results from doing things the wrong way. However the only way to sustain results is to do it the right way, and hopefully serve the community by doing so.