THE ORACLE OF ORACLE

The Story of Volatile CEO Larry Ellison and the Strategies Behind His Company's Phenomenal Success

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FLORENCE STONE is editorial director of Web management communications at the American Management Association. She is also the author of nine books, including *The High-Value Manager* and *Coaching, Counseling & Mentoring*. Ms. Stone previously served as group editor of the American Management Association's newsletters and journals.

MAIN IDEA

"Ruthless, volatile, arrogant, impatient, autocratic – all these adjectives have been used to describe Larry Ellison. I would agree, but I would add adjectives like insightful, customer-centric and focused. In other words, Larry Ellison has all the traits and characteristics that make for an outstanding leader in the high-tech industry. He also has one characteristic that many lack – the ability to sell his ideas to others. It is for this reason that I think of Ellison as the 21st Century's P.T. Barnum. Ellison's business persona has become so intertwined with his personal life that it is impossible to separate them."

    – Florence Stone

Larry Ellison's personality tends to generate two completely different reactions from most people – he is either an arrogant leader who uses other people's ideas or a visionary leader who had the foresight to take a neglected concept and turn it into a huge, successful company. And most people view Ellison's larger-than-life actions and outrageous comments simply as a way to generate reams of publicity for him and for the company he founded, Oracle.

Yet, to focus solely on the rights or wrongs of Larry Ellison's personality is to ignore the real story – how a company started with $2,000 in 1977 is today the second largest software company in the world with a multi-billion-dollar market capitalization. This achievement is highly impressive, even more so in light of the intensely competitive nature of high technology industries where new companies can appear, grow and die within short time frames.

In total, the continuing success of Oracle is impressive. It reflects the fact that beneath all the showmanship, the requisite vision, drive and optimism of Larry Ellison and the Oracle management team is sound and well directed. It also shows the company must be doing many things right, and is worthy of closer inspection.

To get caught up on Larry Ellison's personality traits is to miss the real story here. Irrespective of his personality quirks, Oracle has prospered where others have failed by:
• Consistently seeking to hire and retain the best and brightest people possible.
• Going for the jugular in a no-holds-barred fashion whenever any competitors have appeared on the horizon.
• Applying all the resources of the company to locking in current customers and locking out competitors.
• Running effective product development projects that deliver products the marketplace wants.

Key #1	Organize the company to reflect the drive, ambition and style of its CEO.
Key #2	Make "crushing the competition" more than a marketing slogan.
Key #3	Lock in clients for life and lock out the competition.
Key #4	Product development – Look beyond today to the needs of tomorrow.

The Future #1	The company has learned how to handle crises and missteps.
The Future #2	Oracle is moving aggressively to integrate the Web into the way it does business.
The Future #3	Oracle will take maximum advantage of the high profile of its CEO.
The Future #4	Oracle will look to change and evolve as the software industry changes.

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