TAKE MY ADVICE

INTERVIEW BY STEVE CALECHMAN
PHOTOGRAPH BY EJ CAMP

"*EVERYTHING* CAN BE MORE EFFICIENT. THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS 'WE'RE DONE.'"

Access Granted

Upgrade your career with free tech support from billionaire computer whiz Michael Dell

YOU LAUNCHED DELL COMPUTER CORPORATION WITH A $1,000 INVESTMENT. HOW? You have to have a tremendous amount of passion, and it has to go beyond the opportunistic enthusiasm and excess capital that we saw a few years ago. Businesses with too much funding are very dangerous. It's spent on the wrong things. A company that starts with a very small amount of money has to allocate it in a critical way. Walk around our buildings. They're built to make money, not spend money. Our shareholders and customers don't benefit if we have fine art in our offices.

WHY DID THE BETTER-FUNDED VENTURES FAIL? A lack of good data. Think about most meetings. If you don't have any facts, you don't have any data. Then it's just a bunch of guys sitting around talking. [Another problem is] a lack of commitment to making good decisions based on data. Emotions are good. They're important. But they're not really useful when you're trying to make decisions. In fitness, you can measure your pulse. You can measure your speed. In business, you can measure your orders, customer satisfaction, and cycle time—how long it takes for an order to be filled. Somebody has a problem, how long does it take to resolve it? If somebody needs a spare part, how long does it take to ship it? How long does it take to design a product? If you can reduce cycle time, you take out costs, you take out inefficiency. *Everything* can be more efficient. There's no such thing as "We're done."

HOW CAN A GUY CLIMB THE LADDER MORE EFFICIENTLY? People obsessed with their careers don't do as well as those who are obsessed with results. If you have one person always asking, "When's the next promotion?" and another person asking, "How can I help?" it's pretty obvious which one is making a bigger contribution.

WHAT TRAIT DO YOU WISH YOU COULD DOWNLOAD INTO PEOPLE? Curiosity. People who learn voraciously are much more prone to success. They're able to think about the whole business, the whole problem, the whole opportunity, because their minds are taking on all these things.

WHAT WOULD YOU DELETE? The way people focus on the boss, as opposed to focusing on results. You don't totally ignore the boss, but the person in charge has a lot more to worry about than just you, and you have to worry about a lot more than just the boss. You've got to worry about your peers, the organization, your customers. If you're a good teammate, a good leader, if you're helpful and provide great value to your customers, that's going to be far more valuable to the organization than just focusing on the boss. **MH**

DELL'S DIRECTIVES

1. Spend money to succeed, not to impress.

2. Anything that can be measured can be improved.

3. Curiosity is a rare commodity—develop it.

4. Ambitious people focus on career. Successful people focus on results.