

PREVIEW CASE

CYNTHIA DANAHER

Cynthia Danaher was named vice president and general manager of Hewlett-Packard Company's Medical Products Group several years ago. At the time, she told the 5,300 employees in the group: "I want to do this job, but it's scary and I need your help." She also stated that they finally had a boss who "knows how to make coffee." Three years after making this statement, Danaher indicated that this approach was a mistake. If she held the meeting today, she wouldn't state that she was scared and wouldn't mention her coffee-making ability. Instead, she would propose some of the growth goals for the business and challenge employees to think about what *they* needed to do in order for the company to achieve them.

Danaher has altered her leadership style as she has been promoted. She now thinks that, when a manager is in charge of thousands of employees, the ability to set direction and delegate is more crucial than team building and coaching. Danaher acknowledges that at times she found the transition to senior management so difficult that she considered quitting her job. "I felt a lot of grief letting go of who I'd been." In her previous job, as head of the Medical Products Group's ultrasound-imaging business, Danaher was very close to the 500 employees in that division. She knew many of them by name and was involved in virtually all decisions, from product development to sales and advertising. Moving to that post from her prior job of marketing manager of ultrasound imaging was like "going from sixth grade into junior high. I knew all the customers, I knew the product line, and I knew all the staff," Danaher stated.

She noted that her promotion to general manager was "like going from eighth grade to college." She spent her first months scurrying to learn aspects of the business that she hadn't managed before while trying to maintain her style as a hands-on, involved-with-employees leader. "Whether it was product pricing or someone's parent going to a nursing home, I wanted to help people solve their problems," she says.

But overseeing 10 times the number of people she had previously supervised, plus half a dozen major businesses, that style "nearly killed me. I needed distance to get my new job done." Initially, Danaher resisted letting go of the details. Eager to foster teamwork, she held an off-site retreat with her top managers. She asked questions like "How can we trust one another?" But she did most of the talking, while her managers, who compete with each other for resources while running their distinct businesses, remained hesitant to share problems.

For more information on the Medical Products Group at Hewlett-Packard, visit the group's home page at www.healthcare.agilent.com/mpg.

At first, she blamed herself for their lack of cooperation. Later, she concluded, "It isn't my job to bring them together." Instead, she encouraged them to promote teamwork in their own units. Becoming more independent and tougher-minded has been especially hard. She says. "I was brought up to believe that if I did what was best for everyone else, and made others comfortable, I was a good person." She says. "I don't think men are raised that way."

Danaher has learned to say no and delegate more. When one manager asked her to help interview candidates for a lower level managerial job, she declined, saying the choice was his to make. She relies heavily on her administrative assistant to keep her on a schedule and screen her from constant interruptions by employees seeking her counsel. But she hasn't entirely shed her sympathetic style. "If an employee has a sick child and needs to get to the hospital, I'm on the phone trying to help," she says. "I still get involved, but I choose where more carefully, and it's not out of obligation, but wanting to."¹

1. Why a change was needed for Cynthia in her leadership style? Was she right?
2. Was there any alternative way for Cynthia
3. Learning lessons.