



LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

An Interview with Karl Weiss
VP, Material Handling and Underground Division
Caterpillar Inc.



We are thrilled to have Karl Weiss join us as the Opening Keynote speaker at the American Manufacturing Summit, which will be held in Lombard, IL from March 27-28. He will be discussing "Manufacturing Strategy and Helping Customers Win Through Operational Excellence".

Since joining Caterpillar in 1992, Karl has had various assignments within product development at Caterpillar's Decatur, Joliet, and Aurora facilities, primarily focused on large machine structural design. He has also taken on international assignments in Geneva, Switzerland and Beijing, China. Since 2013, Karl has been a Caterpillar Inc. Vice President, previously of the Earthmoving division and currently of the Material Handling and Underground division.

We sat down with Karl in advance of the event to talk about his career, his own leadership style, and what he will be talking about at the American Manufacturing Summit.

CATERPILLAR

OVERVIEW

- How would you describe your leadership style?
- What are the most important minutes of the day to sustain and grow your organizational goals?
- What is the best piece of advice you've received in your career?
- What was the toughest challenge you've faced in your career and how did you overcome it?
- What is the smallest change you have made within your role that has made the biggest impact?



How would you describe your leadership style?

For me, leadership comes down to providing an environment in your organization that enables the team to excel. One of my favorite quotes is from Colin Powell, "Leadership is the art of doing more than the science of management says is possible." The most important element of creating that environment is providing your team clarity. Of course, clarity includes a compelling vision of the where you want your team to go, but it also means providing them a clear and consistent framework of behavioral expectations and boundaries to help them get there. Given that framework, the team should then feel confident in operating with speed and autonomy, feel encouraged to take calculated risks (but always have an exit strategy!) and lastly, always have a bias toward taking action.

As the VP for your division, what are the most important minutes of the day to sustain and grow your organizational goals?

Our Caterpillar management framework is laid out in our Operating & Execution Model. This model biases resource allocation to the areas with the greatest potential for value growth. I diligently work to spend my time using this same methodology. This is not as simple as it sounds, and requires a lot of discipline to focus on the *important* rather than the *urgent*. To that point, I always ensure I spend a few quiet minutes each day to review priorities and plan for the day and weeks ahead. But in the end, the most important time I spend each day is coaching members of our team, and I consciously work to create opportunities in my schedule to enable these important interactions.

What is the best piece of advice that you have received over the course of your journey to success with Caterpillar?

As an aspiring engineer and manager early in my career, I focused on facts, data and making good decisions. I believed that given the right facts and data, everyone would clearly see the same answer and execute. I then found myself frustrated many times when I thought a decision was made, yet we struggled to execute. Mid-way through my career, I asked a successful Caterpillar executive upon his retirement this very same question, "What advice helped you the most?" His answer was that good execution in organizations almost always come down to good change management. The key is to ensure the right folks understand the decision within the context of their perspective. Taking the time to think through this step and acting upon it saves significant time later, and most always brings better results.

What is one of the toughest challenges you have faced in your career and how did you overcome it?

A few years ago, I received a call at 10:30pm, while traveling, from the wife of one of my direct reports. She called to tell me that her husband had passed away unexpectedly. So many emotions went through my mind within fractions of seconds. Of course, my immediate focus turned toward helping and supporting her and her family. But in the aftermath, I learned a lot about the importance of keeping my own life balanced so that I could support their family and my entire team through such a traumatic time. For me personally, that meant creating enough time for my family, exercise and spiritual fulfillment. And to this day, I still ensure I intentionally block time to create that balance.

Within your role, what has been the smallest change you have made that has had the biggest impact?

As I mentioned in question one, I truly believe that clarity is a key driver for workforce engagement. I have an intentional communication strategy which allows me to communicate as clearly and as much as possible within our organization so that employees at every level understand our goals, what it takes to achieve them and how each individual plays a role in our success.

**What book would you recommend to your team?**

So much of our success revolves around getting the most from our teams. Toward this end, *First, Break all the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers do Differently* by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman provides a great foundation for doing just that. If you haven't read it already, it is well worth the read.

What can attendees look forward to from your presentation?


Without giving too much away, there's two themes you can expect to hear from me on March 27:

1. A focus on the customer – it is all about the customer.
2. Manufacturing may not be seen as the most glamorous or sexy industry, but it is critical to employment, growth of the global economy and our future!

Interested in hearing more insights from Karl Weiss and other industry leaders?

[View the Program](#)

Connect with Generis

 [Subscribe to our Blog](#)

 [Connect on LinkedIn](#)

 [Follow us on Twitter](#)

 [Email Us](#)