



Greg Zehner

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At the time of this interview, Greg Zehner was with Goldman Sachs. Greg enjoys time with his wife, Jacki and his two children Mathew and Alexandra. His favorite book is Atlas Shrugged by Ayn Rand and his favorite hero is Teddy Roosevelt.

professional

What are top 3 principles for success in your industry?

First is that hard work really pays off. I think you have to work hard enough that you feel you know more than your competition. Especially in a trading position, your edge is your knowledge. You have to be a news junkie, which I was, and I really enjoyed reading the news and really following what's going on, talking to the people on the ground in the various locations. Hard work and being a news junkie was one thing. Another thing is basic common sense and understanding ... seeing the forest from the trees. I think there is so much information out there and you get bombarded with so much. Really being able to distill that information down to a few essential points is critical. Understanding the fundamentals of any kind of trading position that you're taking is critical and understanding when the fundamentals change. I think traders in general have this stereotype that traders are macho and really are in a way arrogant. Actually that's a bad characteristic in a trader. You want someone who is humble and is willing to admit when they're wrong and willing to see change. The arrogant and the macho people will get run over by the bus and they won't see it coming. That's a critical factor that goes with common sense as well.

What makes a great leader?

I think integrity is key. People want to be able to trust the person that they are following. That person has to be fair, has to have good judgment and has to make tough decisions. They have to have the integrity to do that and going back to being fair, they have to have the information to be fair. I think a good leader reaches out to everybody. A good leader knows everybody's name to the extent that they're managing a group of 40 people, they should certainly know all 40 people's names. If they're a CEO of an institution ... they can't ... but they should know as many as they can. Get to know those people as best as they can so they have information when it comes to decisions about those people. They also have to have the boldness to make tough decisions. I think it is easy ... and this is something I've learned over time ... it is easy just to live with the status quo because that's the path of least resistance. A leader has to have vision, a leader has to have the ability to implement the vision and the courage to implement the vision. They also need to know how to get the most out of people. A person that may not be good at one job might be good at another job. Also knowing how to motivate people is important. At the end of the day, it is also important to know when that person isn't a fit. Keeping people around who aren't a fit, and who are bad at their jobs, unmotivate people who are good at their jobs. That is a tough thing. It took me a long time to learn that. It's a very difficult thing because you want to see the best in people, you want them to succeed, but at the end of the day, you can't keep someone who is not performing. It hurts the organization in a lot of different ways. That's a really difficult thing as a leader.

How did you get involved in the career you are in?

What motivates you in your career?

What tips can you give for working with others?



personal

How do you define success? How has your definition evolved?

As much as I'd hate to admit it, now that I look back, success used to be very much tied up with my career. I used to really not see that in myself. But success was getting the deal done, having a good trading position. I remember ... and my wife criticizes me for this and she was absolutely right ... my mood was a function of how much money I'd made or lost during the day. As much as I said that didn't define me, clearly it defined me because it defined my mood. Success used to be very much tied to the career. Since I've had children, it's changed a lot. I look at my children and success now is how good a parent I am and how good my children are going to turn out to be. That's changed a lot over time. Success is having a good relationship with God, being able to take things in stride, and understand that there's a greater purpose and a greater meaning and a greater hand in life. I used to know that, but I didn't live that. That's something that's evolved over time.

spiritual

Can you follow Christ and still have a successful career, family and such?

It depends on your definition of success. If your definition of success is doing extremely well at your career and that's your sole definition of success, you can't have it all. You can't have it all, but you're going to work so hard that you will neglect your family. If you're going to have a balance between career and family, your career is going to have to suffer. That's just the truth. You can't work 16-hour days and have your family life exactly as you want it, as much as you probably would like to believe that. If you have a nanny taking care of your children, a nanny's taking care of your children, not you, and he or she is the biggest influence on your child's life. Not you. As much as you would probably not like to believe that. So I'm not sure you can have it all. I think you're going to have to make trade offs and trade off is the word. It's not sacrifice. Because what you have to do is list your priorities and prioritize the most important things to you and then periodically review that to make sure you're living your life according to those priorities. Because if something is suffering as a result of you prioritizing something else which is higher on the list, you can't call that sacrifice. If it is a sacrifice to you, in that you have to get yourself around the fact that maybe you have this list in your mind, but somewhere else there's a disconnect. Because if you're saying, "Oh, I'm sacrificing my career ... " then the career is maybe higher than your family, even though you don't want to admit that when you write it down on a piece of paper. You really have to come to grips with that.

How does your faith help you in your professional life?

I think you can obviously have faith and also have a career in finance. There's no question. There's just the time constraints that are put on you. Can you make it to the Bible study two nights a week or three nights a week? Where does that fall in and how do those trade offs work? Clearly there are a lot of people with faith, and I think faith makes you, in certain ways, better. Faith gives you the ability in very trying times, which you get in the finance industry, whether you're a trader or whether you're working on a deal for investment banking where you're in competition, you're making a pitch, to keep you calm and keep you seeing clearly. You know that you've done your best and you know that it's in God's hands at that point. Faith can actually make you more effective in your career. It doesn't have to be that way and God doesn't always work that way, but for me it did. I felt it did.

What spiritual principles do you live and work by?

How much faith can you put in yourself versus faith in the eternal?