

## SOS Consulting – Helping Organizations Build a Cohesive Leadership Team Based on Trust



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**"I think most organizations were founded with some thought around putting something good out into the world. I want to help organizations be able to do that and to do it consistently so that not only does the organization do well but the individuals in that organization and their communities flourish as well."  
Susan O. Schall PhD**

**CEO CFO:** *Dr. Schall, one of the first things I see on the SOS Consulting website is "It is difficult to chart a clear course in a sea of constant change." How does SOS help in that situation?*

**Dr. Schall:** We create a cohesive leadership team that is clear on its strategy and direction and can communicate that consistently and concisely across the organization.

**CEO CFO:** *Why is it so hard for an executive team to get their act together?*

**Dr. Schall:** You would think by the time they got to that level, they would work together but they have gotten to where they are perhaps by not working with others, by standing above or on the shoulders of other people, so they have not learned or had much practice in working together as a team cohesively.

**CEO CFO:** *What do you understand on a fundamental level about what is needed for a team to come together?*

**Dr. Schall:** The fundamental thing that is needed is trust. At the core of all of it, they have to be able to trust one another to share openly and to debate the hard challenging issues. They have to be able to trust that what they say in their meetings, will stay in their meetings and that they can admit their mistakes or admit that they do not know things and that they can support one another in addressing those weaknesses or those gaps in their knowledge.

**CEOFCO:** *Can you tell when you are first meeting with a company whether they are going to be able to do that or not, or can it always be taught?*

**Dr. Schall:** I think it can always be taught, the question is how long will it take. You get strong clues when you meet someone by their body language and the language they use around and with one another.

**CEOFCO:** *How do you tailor your approach; would you give us an example?*

**Dr. Schall:** We have been working over the last couple of years with a large state-funded institution in the Gulf region of the US. The Research Enterprise grew rapidly and did not put in place basic human resource processes and had a revolving door of leadership that did not create trusting relationships. We started building trust with a model called The Six Types of Working Genius. The model allows them to recognize their gifts and those of others, with no guilt, no shame, and no judgment on what you have and what somebody else has. It takes all of us and all of our gifts to get work done.

We did an exercise with the group in March. We tip-toed into having them do more sharing than we thought they might be ready for. They loved it. When we got done, they asked if we could do this with the next-level teams. They had some other changes going on in the summer, so they finally came back and said they wanted to plan this before the end of the year. So yesterday I gave them a proposal for doing it.

**CEOFCO:** *When you are working with an organization, how do you help them not revert to their old ways?*

**Dr. Schall:** It is something the team has to put on the table, how not to revert. Another key thing to work together cohesively with is holding one another accountable, and making it easier for us to do this new thing and make it difficult to do the old bad behaviors. They need to have that conversation around the table and agree on the triggers that allow them to fall into their old habits, how to prevent it, and how to call one another out on that when they see it happen. I cannot do it for them; they need to do it together.

**CEOFCO:** *Do you see a difference in male and female, regions, ethnicity, or where do you see the differences that you need to hone in on or at least recognize?*

**Dr. Schall:** There are more similarities than there are differences. I see some differences between males versus females. The women are generally more receptive to doing team-building and people-type things whereas the men often say it is too soft, they say "We are not holding hands and singing Kumbaya." But once they see the impact in terms of productivity and morale, that changes. They want to see the bottom-line impact first.

**CEOFCO:** *Is there a way to measure the morale?*

**Dr. Schall:** I think how people feel about coming to work every day cannot be measured. If the leaders were coming in to work dreading it every day because of the fires or the chaos, and that has shifted, they can feel that themselves without having a yardstick to measure it. It

shows up in things like turnover, retention rates, absenteeism, and safety incidents in a manufacturing environment. It shows up in all those metrics.

**CEOCFO: *How long might you work with a company?***

**Dr. Schall:** It depends on what their needs are. I have had some organizations doing various types of work where I have had long-term, multi-year relationships, and others that were relatively quick where I would go in and do some training and coach people through applying what they have learned and then that is the end of the engagement.

**CEOCFO: *You have many years of experience. What has changed in your approach over time, and how do you adapt to the macro economy and world events?***

**Dr. Schall:** I am an engineer by education, so originally, I was very data-focused - a data geek. I love working with numbers and I love statistics. I would say the first twenty years of my career were focused on doing process improvement work, focused around getting the data to identify root causes, and then verifying the solution is working. I had quite a bit of success doing that.

As I reflected ten or fifteen years ago on what was working and what was not working. The most successful organizations were those that had leadership and strategic clarity on who they were as an organization, and were then applying the data-based tools in targeted and focused ways. The organization as a whole knew who they were and where they were going and had created a culture and environment that facilitated improvement.

As I started trying to figure out what was different, I had a friend who I worked with at DuPont that showed me a book that he had just read and recommend I read. It was the Patrick Lencioni book, *The Advantage*, about organizational health that starts with a cohesive leadership team. As I compared that to the experience of successful organizations that I had worked with, I said "Yep they had that." That started me on a journey focusing on leadership and learning more about leadership best practices, team-building, and trust-building, that I could incorporate into my offerings. Once a leadership team has clarity and cohesion, it is then we quickly move into making improvements in targeted areas with data to make good decisions.

**CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about your recognition in the Marquis Who's Who?***

**Dr. Schall:** It was ten years ago when I got a phone call and I have been interacting with them ever since.

**CEOCFO: *Do you do much outreach or are people coming to you?***

**Dr. Schall:** I have both. I try to do outreach through my professional relationships, involvement in professional organizations, and a little bit on LinkedIn. Most of my work has been generated by either people I have worked with in the past or people I know through my professional relationships. The current work with the higher education institution was through volunteer work I have done for over thirty years in ABET, which

is the global accreditor of engineering, technology, applied and natural sciences and computing college programs.

The VP of Research at the institution I mentioned earlier was also a volunteer. He reached out to my colleague Larry and said he needed help in this area and then Larry called me and asked me how we could help. It grew from there.

**CEOFCO: *How do you know when it is not working?***

**Dr. Schall:** When I care more about the results than the client does. That was the case with a local client where I cared more about getting the results than they did; they were not making the changes needed. I went to the senior leader and told him it was not working and that he could save himself some money and I could go help someone else that was willing to put in the work, so we should chalk this up as a learning experience and move on.

**CEOFCO: *What do you see ahead for SOS Consulting?***

**Dr. Schall:** What I hope is that the virtual leadership master class that I have developed will launch in 2024 with one or two offerings. It is choked full of the concepts and models that I have learned over the last ten or fifteen years with coaching to apply to the leader's organization. By delivering it virtually I can work with leaders all over the US, not just local leaders and I do not have to travel.

It is designed for a group of six to eight leaders. It can be completed in three months. I can facilitate a cohort of leaders every quarter of the year. I would love to say I could do it four times next year but I am not sure that it will be received to do it that often – leadership is a hard sell, particularly in small manufacturing. If I could do it at least once and see how the material plays out, how I need to improve it, and how to better talk about it and market it and have some results to show, that would be terrific. I believe it is something leaders across industries need.

I shared it with a group of leaders within my church recently and I got positive feedback from one of the ladies in the class who works in a local school system as her full-time job. She said she took some of these concepts to her principal and asked him why they are not doing these things in the school. Leadership has a ripple effect in the community.

**CEOFCO: *What do you see as perhaps easier to focus on or transmit if it is virtual, and what are the more difficult things?***

**Dr. Schall:** I had struggled with doing things virtually but after two years of being on ZOOM during the pandemic and seeing other people do similar things, I thought I could make this work. I do some part-time training for the Graduate School USA which is a non-profit institution that serves the federal agencies in DC. I have delivered statistics training for them for the last two years and teaching mathematical concepts is difficult.

The way I prefer teach statistics it is very hands-on, it is just not about punching numbers in calculators and getting a result, it is collecting data that you understand and know where it came from and then crunching numbers and being able to interpret it with some context. You cannot do

that when you are on ZOOM because not everybody is together to collect the same data.

On the leadership side, some of these concepts are a bit uncomfortable for people and it is not what they are accustomed to. Reading their body language and dealing with that discomfort is more difficult on ZOOM.

**CEOCFO: *Why look at SOS Consulting; how is the company important?***

**Dr. Schall:** I believe that every individual and every organization has a purpose. We are to do good in the world and make the world a better place. I think most organizations were founded with some thought around putting something good out into the world. I want to help organizations be able to do that and to do it consistently so that not only does the organization do well but the individuals in that organization and their communities flourish as well.

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