

Summary Points from *Meet the CEO Series* Meeting held on April 10, 2013

Al A. Gonsoulin, Chairman of the Board/CEO of Petroleum Helicopters, Inc. (PHI) located in Lafayette, LA was the guest for the *Meet the CEO Series* meeting in April. Gonsoulin, a 1965 graduate of then-USL, purchased controlling interest of the company in 2001. PHI has a long history of providing helicopter services to the offshore oil and gas industry and is known today as one of the leading helicopter transportation service companies in the world.

Mr. Gonsoulin offered his perspective on numerous current topics related to business and leadership. Specifically:

- Gonsoulin provided background on the company, noting that since its inception in 1981, PHI has grown into offering services beyond just oil and gas industry transportation. He explained that when he bought the company, it was a family-run business on the verge of bankruptcy. His challenge as a leader was to change the culture of the organization. He recognized that people are an important part of the work environment and employees should have input into the process of decision-making in the company. He further described that he applies common sense to the process of making decisions at PHI and takes risks with flexibility and an understanding of the whole picture. Noting that change is hard, Gonsoulin stated that he listens to all ideas, even those from competitors, when thinking about doing things differently at PHI.
- In response to a question regarding the disclosure process for public companies, Gonsoulin explained that he holds 70% of the voting stock in PHI so the company is quasi public-private. He does not participate in quarterly calls with analysts and the company does not issue press releases relative to earnings. He commented that these external control mechanisms can be a barrier to progress in a business so he tries to limit the amount of information that is released publicly.
- On the topic of strategic planning, Mr. Gonsoulin described a 5-year planning cycle for PHI. He stated that in his position, he has to be a dreamer and someone who is making plans for activities that will happen sometime in the future. He said PHI engages in meetings quarterly and annually to make adjustments to the 5-year plan. Fulfilling the current and anticipated future needs of the customer are major considerations in the planning process and Gonsoulin mentioned good relationships with major customers like BP and Shell. His tips on effective strategic planning included: be flexible, be willing to take risks and understand the customer.
- When discussing his personal leadership style, Gonsoulin described himself as a “hands-on manager”. He said he gets out of his office frequently and talks to employees every day. He has put into place methods for employees to offer suggestions, make complaints and send him ideas on how to make improvements in the company. He insisted that it is important for leaders to take time to listen to the people they lead. He also discussed the value of good employee training, noting that all new PHI employees are in training for 12 months so that they may fully understand their job and how they can contribute to achieving the goals of the organization. Gonsoulin also mentioned that many employees are currently participating in the well known Dale Carnegie leadership training program.

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