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## Strive to reach your full potential, Perea says

BY SHARON BALTES

Rita Perea used to work 16-hour days as an executive, but now, through her training and consulting business, she teaches others how to avoid falling into that kind of routine.

"I learned very early on in my career that you really need to schedule and prioritize, and you need to give people the time they need," Perea said. "People come first, and tasks and things come next."

A native of Cleveland, Perea lived in several places across Iowa before settling in Des Moines five years ago. Her background includes working for a non-profit organization in various roles, including as executive director, and serving as a superintendent for a large school district in Iowa. She has earned bachelor's and master's degrees, and is currently completing work toward a doctorate in organizational psychology.

She launched Legacy Leadership Solutions Consulting Group Inc. in 2001, with a focus on leadership development. "I wanted to help people be self-aware about the legacy that they were leaving behind when they left this earth," she said.

Over the past four years, her company has expanded significantly, and now offers a wide range of personal and professional development services, consulting and keynote speaking. Perea has two part-time associates who work out of the company's downtown office on Court Avenue.

"I actually wear several different hats," she said. "I love that every hour of every day is something different."

A typical day for Perea might begin with a company-sponsored leadership summit for managers and continue with several coaching sessions for various companies and individuals. The next day, she might be flying to another city to conduct a daylong seminar.

Last week, she was in San Antonio to work with the American Payroll Association.

In her work with Greater Des Moines companies, Perea said, three issues appear to be cropping up for management teams. The first, emotional intelligence, is the idea that emotional health is fundamental to effective learning.

"Research supports the idea that you must have emotional intelligence to be an effective leader," Perea said. "The concept centers on self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, intuition, empathy and social skills. Truly effective leaders and top performers possess a high degree of all those skills."

Today's competitive, global marketplace makes employee retention another issue at the forefront of many managers' minds, Perea said. She works with companies to help them understand what motivates workers and gives them a high level of job satisfaction.

A third issue, work-life balance, although not a new topic, has never been more crucial than it is today, according to Perea.

"Across all sectors, people are being asked to do more with less — less time, resources, support staff — and we're all feeling the squeeze," she said.

Perea is one of only five certified trainers in the nation for a set of time management strategies based on the book "Making Work Work." Using these strategies, she shares tips with groups or individuals on how to organize their workdays more effectively. For example, she teaches people not to check e-mail first thing in the morning. Instead, listen to voice mail to make sure there's nothing pressing, and then spend the first couple of hours of the day working on a project.

"E-mail is a time gobbler," Perea said. "It's much more efficient to work on a project when you're at your freshest in the morning and then check e-mail when you're at a stopping point."



Rita Perea

Another set of strategies Perea uses with her training and coaching comes from the best-selling book "Crucial Conversations," whose authors trained her how to teach the book's principles to others. Until a couple of years ago, she was the only certified Crucial Conversations trainer in Iowa.

Transitions and their effects on employees are a topic that Perea also concentrates on in her coaching, training and consulting. Through seminars such as "Navigating Life's Changes" and "Recovery After Job Loss or Change in an Organization," she teaches companies how to help employees through periods of transition in their personal or work lives.

"Really, through the coaching process, I'm providing strategic skills and awareness to help people achieve their fullest potential," she said. "I really believe that the work I'm doing is my calling, and I feel so blessed to be able to share this information with the world." ▮