

Leadership Profile: Mary Dillon

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LEADER PROFILE 2

Mary Dillon, CEO of Ulta Beauty is a transformational and strategic leader who believes that by being honest, authentic, and real, she will continue to inspire her team. Dillon was born on the south side of Chicago to a steel-worker and a housewife. Dillon earned her degree in marketing and Asian studies from the University of Illinois in 1983. Global chief marketing officer and executive vice president of McDonald's, CEO, and president of U.S. Cellular, Dillon joined Ulta Beauty in 2013.

As CEO of Ulta Beauty, Dillon is described as consistent, collaborative, and always curious. A great listener, Dillon prides herself in fostering inclusivity and collaboration rather than being the type of leader that needs to be in charge. Whenever Dillon goes to any city whether, on vacation or business, she makes sure to stop into the closest Ulta Beauty to connect with their front-line associates, show them respect, listen, and learn. Maintaining openness to diverse ideas and conditions has been demonstrated to lead to individual and organizational health (Weick, 1995). When visiting a market, she tries to bring together as many general managers to sit down and talk. Building relationships with her team across the company, Dillon finds importance in constantly connecting and learning insights from the people who know their own market. Dillon leads and inspires her team by being an open, honest, authentic, and real person. Being team-oriented, Dillon encourages debate and discussion. As a leader, Dillon focuses on creating a positive, exciting, and consumer-centered culture.

For many, the motivation and optimal functioning of employees is largely seen to be driven by leader behavior (Gilbert & Kelloway, 2014). Dillon brings a positive and empowering leadership approach in order to build high-performing teams. With an emphasis on promoting from within, Dillon motivates her employees by showing them that their success and growth is important to the company. Dillon's excellent listening skills make her employees feel that they

can contribute and as a result, they themselves become better leaders. The most important goal for the company is that its associates feel value. Because they want their customer's experience to be meaningful, they make the associate experience as great as possible so that it translates to the guests' experience. Dillon asks her front line associates for suggestions on things that the company can improve on which encourages them to drive their part of the business or bring new ideas; it also gives them power and autonomy. Autonomous work motivation has several important effects on organizational performance, well-being, satisfaction, trust, and engagement (Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004).

The leadership team at Ulta Beauty administers culture surveys every year to their employees in order to assess and acknowledge their internal environment. It is important to Dillon that their culture reflects their values as well as winning in the marketplace in a way that they are proud of. Employees are not competing internally as there are plenty of opportunities available to them within the organization. Having a non-competitive environment allowed Dillon to build a cross-functional team environment. In order to analyze the external environment, they emphasize the understanding and maximizing of core human insights which they seek to turn into actionable data.

One of the main objectives for Ulta Beauty has been to open up 100 stores a year. In a time where e-commerce is prevalent and important to most companies, Ulta Beauty has chosen to maintain the in-person bricks and mortars concept for those who are looking to have a human connection in their market. In terms of advanced technologies, Ulta Beauty is reserved in which technology they choose to invest their money; their goal is to advance the experience that they are trying to deliver. Another goal of theirs is to look at new opportunities for offering beauty services within their locations. Being consumer-focused, Ulta Beauty seeks to connect and drive

brand loyalty. Ulta measures success through key performance indicators using data from their customer loyalty program.

Ulta Beauty focuses all of its efforts on catering to the “beauty enthusiast.” The company has a deep knowledge set around the segment of shoppers that they focus on and they seek to tap into their min-set. Beauty enthusiasts are into the beauty experience, newest trends, and love the physical experience of shopping for beauty. Ulta’s motto is All Things Beauty, All in One Place™. Offering hair, brow, and skin services at all of their locations, Ulta gives shoppers an added reason to show up in stores. Often located in malls, the locations are largely convenient for shoppers to get to. Looking for more ways to innovate, they are constantly looking to launch and feature new brands, particularly those that have been invented by influencers on the internet. Aside from new, high-quality brands, Ulta secures partnerships for product exclusives. With the new patterns of personal consumption showing the notion of immediacy, convenience and demand for personalization, they have strengthened their e-commerce as well as invested heavily in their supply chain for faster delivery times.

Dillon does not consider Ulta Beauty as a company that is seeking to take over the competition but rather to be a player in a huge, open market. The emphasis on having a physical presence, however, distinguishes them from their competition. Store openings are contingent upon location convenience, necessity, and human connectedness. Ulta Beauty’s earnings per share and comp continue to grow which shows that they are on the right track both internally and externally.

References

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