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What I’ve Learned as CFO in the First 150 Days

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My first five months as CFO of FLEETCOR has been a whirlwind of activity. I have traveled the globe getting to know the business leaders and finance teams in our diverse, far-reaching markets. I have built upon the knowledge from my 30-plus-year career in banking and payments to quickly get up to speed on FLEETCOR’s complex business and organizational structure to deliver shareholder value.

Banking and Payments - A Common Thread

Joining FLEETCOR was a good fit given my banking and payments experience, as well as my acquisition experience. FLEETCOR checked all of the boxes: it’s a payments company, global, public, large, outsized grower, and innovative. But what was really appealing was its acquisitive nature, its entrepreneurial spirit, and that it is undervalued in the marketplace. It was performing very well and had a great track record, but it had gotten caught in a valuation downdraft of large, legacy public, payments companies. It was energizing to step into a company with such upside potential.

Global Enablement & Local Empowerment

I’m an experiential learner, so I spent my first few months at FLEETCOR visiting offices from Canada, to Europe, to Brazil, having enriched conversations with our highly skilled teams in those markets. I learned how complex FLEETCOR had grown during 20 years of acquiring more than 100 companies.

To manage this business model, I think about our financial leadership in two categories: global enablement and local empowerment. We enable our global functional leaders, such as our chief accounting officer or EVP of investor relations, to apply their functional expertise across the globe. On the local side, we empower each line of business CFO to exert local authority to optimize the business they support. These two approaches in tandem have proven effective at growing our diverse businesses while maintaining high standards across the board.

Table Stakes vs. Higher Stakes

Over the course of my career, I have learned to divide expectations into table stakes and higher stakes. Table stakes are the core activities and deliverables that preserve value. For example, if you don't deliver an audit effectively, you can destroy value. Higher stakes are the steps we take to add value, such as actively managing our interest rate risk or enhancing our liquidity and capital management to drive higher profits. Those things feel more strategic and chunkier, but both are important, and everyone has a role to play. It’s the old story about President Kennedy’s first visit to NASA, where he asked an employee carrying a broom what he was doing, and the employee responded, “I’m helping to put a man on the moon.”

Simplifying the FLEETCOR Story

In my first 30 days at FLEETCOR, we revised the investor presentation to help tell the company story in a simpler way. Whether it's to an internal or external audience, finance’s role is to diagnose and explain in plain English the health of the company. I use the analogy of a physician who looks at scads of data - blood workup, vital signs, blood pressure. If the doctor only gives me the full readout, I won’t know what my true health condition is. I need a physician to interpret the data and coach me on how I can improve my condition. Finance’s job is much the same in its role in the company. We have to take complex data, coupled with our years of education and experience, and distill it down to present the true condition of the company.

Once we have assessed the health of the company, we must determine the levers we can move to maximize the performance of each line of business. We must identify the variables that the businesses can control and discuss these ideas with them in their own language to determine what they should execute. And then the results will take care of themselves.

FLEETCOR has a tremendous amount of data, which is a high-class problem to have. But information overload can work against you. To be useful, the data has to be synthesized down to the key areas of focus. When presenting financials, I believe less is more. It’s better to impress your audience with your insights rather than drown them with information.

What’s Next

With 150 days under my belt at FLEETCOR, I can say our efforts to simplify the FLEETCOR story is already delivering returns. I expect that progress to continue as we look for new potential acquisition targets and continue to deliver strong organic growth in order to maximize shareholder value and lead the world in innovating the way companies pay their expenses.