

Thank God for new Yahoo chief's candor

21 January 2009, By Mike Cassidy

I want to like Carol Bartz -- and maybe I will. But here's a novel thought: I'm going to give her 45 minutes or so to get something done before I decide. "Friggin' breathing room," Bartz might call it.

It's not the way we do it here, is it? Silicon Valley has a fascination with CEOs bordering on a fetish and Bartz is certainly an object of fascination.

She is, of course, not the only one, and the juxtaposition of Bartz, who beat cancer, stepping up to run Yahoo, and Steve Jobs, who's struggling with health problems, stepping aside from running Apple, got me thinking about why I'm rooting for Bartz.

She is a hoot. She shows every indication of being upfront, outspoken even. Her comments drip with a sort of "get real" pragmatism. Should some health issue come up in Bartz's life that would significantly affect Yahoo and/or its stock price, you've got to believe that investors would get something more than Jobs' non-explanation for taking leave: "I have learned that my health-related issues are more complex than I originally thought."

In her first call with analysts and reporters as top Yahoo, Bartz came out seasoning her comments with "kick butt" and "friggin." Now that Seagate has canned Bill Watkins (the other CEO news this week) we need someone like Bartz to fill the salty-CEO role in the valley.

Bartz comes across as genuine, which is something we could genuinely use. She's funny. And funny in these economic times is a plus.

This is a woman who turned Autodesk around after becoming CEO there in 1992. A woman who did not let breast cancer defeat her, or even slow her down much. She received her diagnosis about the same time she got the Autodesk job. Bartz told More magazine in 2006 that she announced her cancer at a press conference about a month after she landed the Autodesk job. A reporter there

asked Bartz "Which breast?" she told the magazine. "What a jerk," though she used a word a touch earthier than jerk.

She is a woman who knows what it's like to be a parent and high-powered business woman. And she says women in particular have to tune out those who attack them for shortchanging their families.

"They think, 'I'm going to cook a great breakfast, wash up the dishes before I leave, take the kids to school, call my college roommate on the way in to work, be a CEO all day, volunteer on the way home, do a little exercising, cook a wonderful dinner, help with homework, have sex,' she told Modern. "I don't think so."

Of course, being outspoken, candid and colorful doesn't mean Bartz will be the right answer for troubled Yahoo. And the blogosphere and the Twittersphere have been debating the Yahoo board's choice for days. Does Bartz have the social media and advertising chops to save a company that has missed opportunities in both areas? Was she even hired to save the company or is she there to clean it up for a sale? And lurking below the surface and in the reader comment sections: Is Bartz, at age 60, too old to "get it" when it comes to a company that makes its living on the Internet?

Silly question. Bartz is a woman who has shown time and again that she absolutely gets it.

And if you ask her, she'll probably tell you the same thing and in no uncertain terms.

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