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Thursday, May 24, 2007

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## LaSorda issues challenge to workers

Automaker's CEO tells employees they must have high expectations for 'The New Chrysler.'

Josee Valcourt / The Detroit News

Chrysler's top executive called his employees to arms Wednesday, challenging them to adopt a different way of thinking as they forge ahead under new owner Cerberus Capital Management LP.

In a message to workers, the latest of several since the announcement May 14 that Chrysler would be sold to Cerberus, CEO Tom LaSorda said although the automaker will reclaim its former Chrysler Corp. name, it "cannot -- and will not -- be the old Chrysler Corporation."

Chrysler will soon become a privately held company, which gives the automaker room to improve its financial condition without pressure from Wall Street. But that doesn't mean it won't be expected to perform, LaSorda said in a company-wide e-mail that was obtained by The Detroit News.

"Our new owners will have and deserve to have high expectations of our performance, just as we must expect that of ourselves," LaSorda said.

Since DaimlerChrysler's announcement that that New York-based Cerberus would buy Chrysler for \$7.4 billion, there have been employee meetings, town hall gatherings, and memos and e-mails from LaSorda and other executives in an effort to ease employee concerns and prepare them for the future.

LaSorda is doing the right thing in communicating his vision for the new Chrysler to employees, said Michael Whitty, a labor professor at University of Detroit, Mercy. "It's quite important at this crucial stage to reassure all the employees that they should redouble their efforts so that the company has an ability to

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grow," he said.

LaSorda told employees the company can't afford to repeat past mistakes. "We never broke the boom-and-bust cycles that slowed our progress every few years and even put our very survival in doubt," the e-mail reads. "This time, we simply have to get it right.

"With the birth of The New Chrysler, we have a unique opportunity to truly reinvent ourselves for future success, while preserving the qualities that have set us apart from the competition: passion, speed, innovation and lean," LaSorda said.

In several places in the e-mail, LaSorda referred to "The New Chrysler," which has become a rallying cry of sorts within the company since the sale.

Also on Wednesday, Chrysler released an audio excerpt of LaSorda's Monday town hall meeting with workers at the company's Auburn Hills headquarters. Employees applauded as LaSorda exclaimed "It's Chrysler Corp. again, back in American hands again!"

The CEO went on to say, "The dealerships -- they're ordering again, which is kind of nice. Their inventory levels from this time last year are down by...about 110,000 units."

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