

## DEVELOPING YOUNG LEADERS

Talent is only the starting point – are you doing enough to develop young leaders in your organisation?

According to research conducted by CASS Business School, City University London, CEOs worldwide, are 54 years of age on average. Young leaders, such as Suchas Gopinath, founder of Global Inc, provide a “wake up call” for all. Talent is getting younger.

Aged 14 Suchas was recognised as the world’s youngest certified professional web developer. Aged 16 CNBC and e-businesss, recognised him as the world’s youngest entrepreneur. One year later, the BBC and the Washington Times recognised him as the world’s youngest CEO. Even more impressive, aged 23, he made history when he became the youngest ever CEO of a Fortune 500 company.

The question business leaders need to ask is: “Are we doing enough to mentor and grow young leaders in our own organisations, and what are some of the important things that we should be telling young leaders?” Undoubtedly the best advice anyone can proffer, is to remind young leaders that success does not just happen: success is planned for. Young leaders need to set the co-ordinates for leadership success. Young leader needs to craft a personal vision and a career destination, which will enable them to allocate, time, energy and resources to those things that will ensure their personal success.

A personal vision is not enough, however. In order to succeed, one also needs drive and personal ambition. Rex Maughan, the 368<sup>th</sup> richest man in the world in 2008 summed this up when he said: “I always wanted to excel. I never wanted to be common or ordinary.”

Young leaders need to pay special attention to developing their leadership style. Although some leadership gurus have drawn up checklists of attributes that successful leaders appear to have embraced, I have never found this approach particularly useful. I urge young leaders instead, to emulate former CEO of General Electric, Jack Welsh, by embracing authentic leadership. Authentic leadership is about knowing yourself, finding your true north and acting accordingly.

We must caution, however, that this path is fraught with difficulties. As poet, EE Cummings cautions: “To be yourself in a world that is doing its best, day and night to make you like everybody else – is to fight the hardest battle any human being can fight, and never stop fighting.”

Young leaders should be encouraged and assisted to find the right mentor, someone, who will be able to maximise their strengths and work on their weaknesses. Mentors should always have broad exposure and knowledge.

As American composer and lyricist Irving Berlin pointed out, “Talent is only the starting point.” It goes without saying that one of the prerequisites for success as a young leader is to ensure that one has a very good understanding of the business, and the right qualifications. It is important never to lose sight of the fact that academic qualifications have a shelf-life. It is imperative therefore, to remind young leaders of the importance of embracing lifelong learning, thereby ensuring that their skills remain current.

As President Woodrow Wilson’s Secretary of War Newton D Baker observed: “The man who graduates today and stops learning tomorrow is uneducated the day after.” The importance of good interpersonal skills cannot be overemphasized. Global icon of non-violent political resistance, Mohandas K Gandhi’s words ring true: “I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people.”