

# BECOMING AN EFFECTIVE GLOBAL LEADER

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Are global leaders born? Or are they made? Is global leadership an innate competency? Or is it an acquired skill, learned and honed throughout a lifetime? On the “nature” side of the argument, there are strong beliefs in such factors as genetic predisposition and karmic pre-destiny. Some people are natural leaders; others are most definitely not. On the “nurturing” side of the argument, there are equally strong beliefs in the need for a caring and supportive family structure, a safe and healthy living environment, and a rigorous but broad education. Here are what some famous leaders have said on the topic:

*“I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people” (Indira Gandhi)*

*“To lead the people, walk behind them” (Lao-Tzu)*

*“In a beginner’s mind, there are many possibilities. In an expert’s there are none.” (Zen Master Suzuki Roshi)*

## Nature versus Nurture

Although there may never be a definitive answer to the nature versus nurture question, most people will agree that no amount of nurturing can make someone into a global leader if he or she does not have a fundamental desire, passion, and talent to be one. And no potential leader, however naturally gifted he or she may be, can become fully realized without a tremendous amount of nurturing. Throughout childhood and adolescence, even the divinely reincarnated Dalai Lama had to undergo intense and lengthy preparation for his weighty role as the spiritual leader of Tibet. But the preparation does not stop at the onset of adulthood; in some ways, it is only just starting.

Potential global leaders must continue their formal education by expanding their theoretical and technical knowledge in various arenas of higher learning, but they must also begin to live the reality of being a global leader through practical experience, particularly traveling, living and working in cultures and countries that are not familiar to them.

## **Built on Practice**

In many ways, preparing to be a global leader is like a native English speaker learning a “difficult” language, such as Arabic, Mandarin, or Finnish. The leader needs to build a solid foundation of grammar, vocabulary, and syntax in the classroom, but at some point, there is no substitute for becoming totally immersed in the language in a country in which it is spoken.

The reason why Esperanto—the international language invented by Dr. Ludwig Zamenhoff in Poland over a century ago—never took off is because there were neither native speakers nor a natural environment in which to practice it. It ended up being a purely intellectual exercise, proving that language, environment, and theory are impotent without practice. Fluency will not flourish in a static environment. Just as language ability can rust without regular polishing, so can global leadership skills. This is a particular challenge for potential global leaders who are already on a chosen career path.

How many leaders find the time in their hectic work and travel schedules to reflect on and define such issues as: “What does it mean to be a global leader?” and, more specifically, “What exactly constitutes ‘competence,’ ‘effectiveness,’ and ‘success’?”

Here the foreign language analogy begins to break down. A couple of weeks of business travel or a vacation in a particular country can be enough to brush up on one’s linguistic fluency—and the results are pretty easy to quantify: either you can make an effective sales pitch or hold your own in a three-hour dinner conversation or you

cannot. By contrast, honing global leadership skills is trickier, because the skills required are qualitative and effectiveness is difficult to measure.

From extensive formal and informal discussions with business people from around the world, we have come up with five key behavioral characteristics of effective and influential corporate global leaders. These characteristics are as follows: *trustworthy, respectful and caring, balanced between “doing” and “being”, emotionally literate, and culturally self aware.*

### **Trustworthy**

Leaders are viewed as dependable, sincere, nondeceptive promise keepers. They show integrity and moral fiber. In many countries, paying government officials to get a project off the ground is part of doing business, but true global leaders are those who would rather walk away from “a deal” than compromise their own or their company’s integrity. In this way, they earn high levels of respect.

### **Respectful and Caring**

Global leaders demonstrate a high regard for the dignity, worth, well-being, and autonomy of all people, including themselves. They are genuinely interested in learning from other cultures, and they are able to demonstrate cultural empathy by consistently “seeing the picture” from various cultural points of view, including his or her own. These leaders also show their desire to learn and “communicate” in the local language.

Many negative examples of global leadership show up in managers

who view their assignments as "temporary". If the assignment is temporary, why should they go to the trouble of communicating and becoming more acquainted with the locals and their culture? Unfortunately, these leaders do not see their learning as an investment in their global leadership skills.

### **Balanced between "Doing" and "Being"**

A global leader has the sensitivity and skills to manage attitudes, values, and expectations around issues of performance and results in the cultural context of those he or she leads. For example, in Latin American and Middle Eastern cultures, there is much more of a "being" than a "doing" orientation. In terms of hiring or buying, who a person is and what sort of character he or she has may be considered more important than technical competence.

The global leader works effectively to accomplish the goals of the organization, while aware of this balance. The trust the leader inspires in others gives him or her license to set the performance bar on both variables: "being" (quality of life) and "doing" (business success).

### **Emotional Literacy**

Emotional awareness, resilience, and persistence are important for global leaders. Especially under difficult or stressful circumstances, these leaders are aware of the source of their feelings and emotions. They are capable of sensing, understanding, and responding effectively in situations that are emotionally charged, and they can "witness" or view themselves on the

cultural stage and direct their responses from this vantage point.

### **Cultural Self-Aware**

Global leaders demonstrate the ability to recognize, and then learn from, the different behavioral expectations required of different roles, both in their own culture and in the cultural context in which they are operating. They learn to recognize and deal effectively with the different attitudes, values, and expectations placed on cultural variables such as power, competitiveness, time, space (physical proximity), individualism, performance, formality, and structure. This information gives them knowledge required to establish meaningful and effective relationships and to work successfully with people who operate from different cultural orientations.

Looking to the future, a new research study of over two hundred "high potential" leaders in international organizations came up with similar requirements for the incoming cohort of global leaders in business, government, and elsewhere.

### **Defining a Global Leader**

A research project, "The Evolving Role of Executive Leadership" conducted by Anderson Consulting and assisted by Keilty, Goldsmith & Company, produced fourteen essential skill categories for global leaders, listed below. Based on the experience of more than one hundred twenty leaders around the world, these broad headings profile eighty vital competencies that global leaders possess. (See Figure 30.1)

FIGURE 30.1 GLOBAL  
LEADERSHIP: THE NEXT  
GENERATION

1. Thinks Globally
2. Anticipates Opportunity
3. Creates a Shared Vision
4. Develops and Empowers People
5. Appreciates Cultural Diversity
6. Builds Teamwork and Partnerships
7. Embraces Change
8. Shows Technological Savvy
9. Encourages Constructive Challenge
10. Ensures Customer Satisfaction
11. Achieves Competitive Advantage
12. Demonstrates Personal Mastery
13. Shares Leadership
14. Lives the Values

*Source:* The Global Leader of the Future research project. 1999 © Anderson Consulting and Keilty, Goldsmith & Company.

In order to envision how an international business manager of today might become a truly global leader of the future, it helps to broaden the perspective and take a quick glance at what a universal leader might look like.

For some people, a universal leader has to have a global mandate. In this case, such people as the secretary general of the United Nations or the Pope would qualify. For others, a universal leader has to have a global impact. The most obvious examples of this are business leaders, such as Bill Gates of technology giant Microsoft, Anita Roddick of the Body Shop, and Jürgen Schrempp of DaimlerChrysler.

The majority of people, however, believe that universal leaders have to embody certain key universal qualities or traits, such as clarity of vision, strength of purpose, courage of one's convictions, and moral integrity, even if their mandate and impact are not

necessarily global in scope. Current and former national leaders, such as Vaclav Havel, Golda Meir, and Ronald Reagan, are often mentioned in this respect. Such maverick business leaders as Ted Turner and Richard Branson are also frequently named. On the humanitarian side, Mother Teresa and Aung San Suu Kyi (of Myanmar) are cited as well.

Given these disparate views of what makes a universal leader, it is hardly surprising that there was little consensus in the global leadership study or elsewhere on how to measure a global leader's effectiveness. On a narrow level, the Pope could be judged by the increase or decrease in the number of his followers around the world; Jack Welch (of General Electric) by his company's employee retention, shareholder valuation, and board support; and Vaclav Havel by the length of his term in office.

But do these essentially quantitative gauges really touch on the issue of quality global leadership? In one sense they do, because they all have a human, democratic element to them. If the leaders do not perform, then they will definitely lose credibility and support; they will probably lose their jobs; and they may even lose their lives. On the other hand, this type of assessment runs the risk of reducing the question of effective global leadership to a mass popularity contest, played out through the increasingly sensationalist media.

The authors of this chapter firmly believe that there must be a more personal way of assessing the quality of a global leader's effectiveness, whether in the narrower business world or in the broader universal context. For example, one could find out what the people who are closest to a leader think about the job that he or she is doing. Lack of

confidentiality often inhibits peers or subordinates from saying what they really think and feel, but there are reliable human resource instruments, such as 360° feedback processes, to use to collect and analyze co-workers' opinions anonymously.

But this is not enough, because a universal leader, who often does not have a clear job description or boss, may not have the same willingness or obligation to listen and respond to the feedback in a constructive and consistent manner. Of course, having one or two trusted advisors, mentors, or coaches can help to reinforce the main messages.

But this is still not enough. Even though the Pope may answer to a “higher authority”, in most cases the only person who can gauge whether a global leader is effective or not is the leader himself or herself. This requires considerable reflection on what has been done and said; on the measurable impact of these deeds and words; on the successes and the mistakes; and on any changes that are necessary.

This introspection will lead to constructive and surprising changes if the leader goes about it diligently and honestly and, more importantly, continuously and consistently.

## **Five Questions**

Here are five questions for global leaders to ask themselves on a regular basis:

1. Why am I a leader, and what do I hope to achieve?
2. Whom do I represent, and where are they located?
3. Why do they trust me to lead them, and how can I help them?

4. What results and other indicators will show me that I am doing my job in helping them to get what they want and need?
5. When is it time for me to step down, and who will replace me?

What makes a global leader of whatever ilk—mandate, impact or character—effective is recognizing and accepting this belief: one of the main purposes of being a leader is to develop new leaders to whom the leader may pass the baton.

We assume that some potentially great global leaders, such as John F. Kennedy, Indira Gandhi, or Alfred Herrhausen (of Deutsche Bank in Germany), never had the chance to be so because their lives and careers were cut short by callous assassins. Many other leaders have been ousted by election, back-room intrigue, boardroom revolt, illness, or death. Prime examples of this phenomenon are Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom. One notable exception in recent years is Nelson Mandela, who decided to resign as president of South Africa after only five years in power. But then, he had nearly 30 years in prison to reflect and prepare for his time as a truly global leader.

## **Conclusion**

An effective global leader requires not only passion and talent, but commitment and practice. From our studies, we have found that corporate global leaders must be trustworthy, respectful and caring, balanced between “doing” and “being”, emotionally literate, and culturally self-aware. Global leaders must also take the time to reflect diligently and honestly on

a continuous and consistent basis to be successful. And most importantly, global leaders must take responsibility for developing new leaders capable of taking on leadership roles in the future.

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