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Rajnish Virmani: Building the Next 100 CEOs Through Leadership, Strategy and Transformation



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Could you briefly introduce yourself and share your journey in global leadership, strategy, and business transformation?

I am a global leader, currently based in India. I have led teams in the USA, UK, EU, APAC and of course India. My career over 40 years can be broadly divided into two distinct parts – First 30 years as a line leader and an employee of large multinational companies. During this phase, I have led large global multi-cultural teams of over 10,000 staff delivering large scale transformation projects at a CIO, COO and CEO level. The second 10 years (and ongoing), I am a Leadership Coach and Consultant. My mission is to “Help Build the Next 100 CEOs”. During this phase I have coached over 500 senior to mid-level leaders, and delivered projects in the field of corporate strategy, organization re-design, sales transformation, operations excellence (Six Sigma).



Based on your experience leading global teams, what qualities define an effective leader in today's rapidly evolving business environment?

India is the startup capital of the world nowadays, so let me focus this response on startups. I coach a lot of Founder / CEOs at different stages of the company's growth journey. I encourage the CEO to evolve personally and professionally to run a successful entrepreneurship venture. This is a difficult journey (take the following as a broad guideline, with lots of overlapping boundaries)

0-50 staff: Resilience, Handling failures, Hustling to get things done, Pitching for growth

50-100 staff: Adapting to the market, Flexibility, Risk Taking, Innovation

100-500 staff: Discipline, Quality / Customer focus, People Retention, Compliance

More than 500: Structure, Standard Processes, Automation, Communication for Staff Engagement and Alignment

As the author of Bloody Good Leadership and host of Your Career Ladder, what are the most

common leadership lessons professionals often overlook?

I do a lot of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) projects at an individual level. Associated with 2 NGOs, I have groomed and mentored over 500 girls (senior school and college going) from financially underserved communities over the last 10 years. My podcast "Your Career Ladder" was initiated with a view to show these girls that all current CEOs and senior leaders had to struggle to get to their current positions... they were not born with the proverbial silver spoons in their mouths. I talk to the girls about PQ (Positivity Quotient)... Think Positive and focus on thoughts that are in your "Zone of Control". Ignore the rest...

In my book "Bloody Good Leadership", I point out the areas that typically I see professionals overlook – e.g. Curiosity / Listening Skills – we are experts in our respective domains and so enjoy being in the "Tell" mode rather than "Ask". I talk of "Bloody Good Questions – BGQs", thought provoking questions that we must all master the art of.

How can organizations successfully lead transformation while building high-performing teams



and a strong organizational culture?

Transformation at a corporate level is a very tough change process and so be prepared to take some tough calls along the way. Expecting to mould behaviour of the detractors may be long-winded and you may need to inject new change promoters.

Create specific Change Agents – Perhaps 3 teams. The core team responsible for driving the change, the key influencers or change ambassadors in the organization to smooth out resistance and the senior governance team. Discipline of these 3 teams is a critical success factor.

Communication giving clarity to the organization. Balance hope and reality. Why are we doing this? What is in it for you? What are the risks involved? What is the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow?

Building the right culture – No silver bullet here. Just small things that matter a lot to the staff – rewards and recognition, regular 1-on-1 check-ins by leaders, tough messages on what is not acceptable.

What advice would you give to aspiring leaders looking to advance into executive roles such as CEO, COO, or CIO?

First and foremost, Believe in Yourself. Sounds like a cliché but is so true. Our subconscious minds are so powerful that our dominant thoughts today become our future tomorrow. That is the power of manifestation. So, if our thoughts today are “Self-doubt, Victim mode, Entitlement, Jealousy, Fear, Apprehension”, unfortunately the future will shape up not too bright. So VISUALIZE yourself at your goal post...

Second, Build Professional Networks and Relationships. At some stage in your career, “WHO you know is more important than WHAT you know”. The sooner you wake up to realize this, the better. Align yourself with the Vision of the organization. Do you have the same purpose as the company’s? Is there passion for the purpose?

Third, Develop more Leaders. A senior leader’s job is to make a leaderful organization. The more leaders you create in your team, the better the team performs.