

Thought leaders

The World Business Forum (WBF) brings market leaders together to discuss the best ways to improve their businesses and industries as a whole.

WORDS JAMES WALMSLEY

Speakers at the World Business Forum 2016, 25–26 May

Sir Richard Branson – Management
 Chris Gardner – Perseverance
 Robert Kaplan – Performance management
 Nicholas Negroponte – Innovation
 Tamara Erickson – People
 John Mattone – Leadership
 Rita McGrath – Strategy
 Mauro Porcini – Marketing

A month after wrapping up, the WBF had already received more than 120 media mentions, all calling it a major success.

Firsthand reports from the attendees backed this up, with an astounding 99 per cent of delegates subscribing their interest in returning.

The success of the forum can largely be attributed to the star-studded line-up of speakers headed by Richard Branson and Chris Gardner — aka the CEO of Happyness. The author of the 2006 autobiography *The Pursuit of Happyness* (on which the famous film starring Will Smith was based) brought genuine direction and conviction to the forum, stating quite plainly that when you have a passion, you need to follow it through at all costs. “When you’re doing something you’re truly passionate about, there is no Plan B. Plan B sucks. If Plan B was any good, then it would be Plan A. Plan B distracts from Plan A,” Chris says, charisma oozing from him.

Chris’s moving talk about his rise from homelessness to be a self-made multimillionaire and global ambassador for perseverance and hope was one that will stay with attendees for many years to come; he was the talk of the show.

Richard Branson explained that the best way to operate business tends to be to promote from within. He says that if you find the best within the people you already have, they will bring out the best in your business. It was a trademark Branson presentation that reinvigorated many of the simple elements of business that get taken for granted, all the while inspiring the audience and making it abundantly clear why he is still at the forefront of global decision-making. >>



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JOHN MATTONE: SPEAKING AT WBF ON COMPANY CULTURE

The position of a CEO is typically revered for its ability to shape a company, and influence an entire workforce. However, these are also the same elements that make the position intimidating, with an astonishing 40 per cent of high-end executives suffering some form of clinical depression, almost double the rate of non-managerial positions. Leadership coach John Mattone believes that this should be entirely avoidable, through the proper management of one's mindset and business culture.

John has spent the past thirty years building his knowledge base and experience in executive development, becoming an entrepreneur himself along

the way. He is the founder and CEO of John Mattone-Global, has consulted with more than 250 organisations and 200 executives, and addressed more than 500,000 people across 2,000-plus speeches and seminars. This has all culminated in him boasting an impressive roster of both past and present clients, including Amazon, Coca-Cola, Ford, and FedEx. Along the way, he has been ranked as one of the world's top leadership authorities and speakers, and even served as leadership coach to Steve Jobs in 2010.

In his recent talk at the World Business Forum, John quickly established that developing a positive culture is the most important step in laying the foundations for a successful business. He states that "the role of the CEO nowadays is to create a culture that unleashes people."

So why isn't this already common practice? John argues that while this is assumed knowledge, it is rarely acted upon to the extent that it needs to be; and part of the problem in this regard can be blamed upon most executives' lack of agility and presence at the grassroots level. "You can't really attend to a culture unless you are on the ground, being vigilant, being with your people," he says.

He says that there is a mentality that causes executives to feel the need to set themselves apart from the greater workforce, and thinks this is exactly the wrong way to go. Rather than the more traditional setting of a separate office and a closed door, a CEO must make themselves accessible and vulnerable.

The benefits of this approach are twofold, with John reinforcing that



by being accessible you can get a stronger gauge of the character of individuals. This helps to identify whether employees are high-potential, emerging leaders that need to be groomed for further success, or have potentially bad character that can hurt the organisation.

Subscribing to the belief that your character defines your destiny as well as the destiny of those around you, John states that you must endeavour to find the flaws in others as well as in yourself, proclaiming that when you don't, "character becomes a really scary thing. A lot of times you can't read character, or you can't detect bad character, but it will always come out." Citing Dennis Kozlowski, Scott Thompson, and Lance Armstrong as examples, he warns, "A lot of people went down with them. Those are some big-time de-railers that can bring down your family." Similarly, he points out that you need to ensure that you aren't a de-railer yourself; that your own ego must always be kept in check as a CEO and can never be allowed to spiral out of control.

It is stressors such as these that can bring on the aforementioned isolation and suffocation that many executives feel, and John believes that when these



"The comfort zone — yes, it feels good, but in reality is the most painful existence and is not going to get you anywhere. The best CEOs are constantly disruptive." - John Mattone

troubles hit, the key is holding onto the positive influences that brought on your success in the first place. "I think a lot of times we've got to be reminded that we have references that exist," he says. "We have a reservoir of pluses and minuses, and when you think about somebody who has ascended to the level of a CEO, they have such a massive reservoir of pluses. A lot of times they just have to be reminded of the positives that exist, and it is about bringing those to life. That will often shift a person's viewpoint from pessimism to optimism."

John acknowledges that this is not always an easy task and takes a lot of practice. He also says that often the best way to get in front of a problem is to take a step back from it. "Ultimately, it's about 'Guess what: it's temporary, it's not permanent'. You learn that what is going on is not going to ruin the world."

However, John says, most CEOs take the full weight of their responsibility to heart: "They know that so many people,

and their families, rely on them. So the privilege mindset can be such a positive. But if it runs out of check, it can also be an instigator of depression."

Changing this mindset is a tough yet necessary step to avoid getting sucked into staying in the comfort zone, and only by occasionally risking things going wrong can you get back on the road towards future productivity and success. "If your mindset is risk averse or promotes being fearless as opposed to being courageous, it is going to reinforce your comfort zone. The comfort zone — yes, it feels good, but in reality is the most painful existence and is not going to get you anywhere. The best CEOs are constantly disruptive, pushing themselves and their people." ■

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