



## The Need for More Truly Global Leaders

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As we look ahead at the global business landscape one thing is certain, we need more global leaders who will be able to successfully lead organizations in what is becoming a more and more interconnected world. Most large fortune 500 companies are entering new markets at an unprecedented pace. Significant sustained investments in China have been announced for the near future from several of the large automotive and high tech companies, in the range of \$2 to \$8 billion per company. These organizations are investing heavily to accelerate their China business. At the same time, the value of Chinese FDI in the US jumped from US \$590 million in 2007 to US \$5.35 billion in 2010, a ten-fold increase, according to a report issued in May by the Asia Society and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. And Chinese FDI in the US is forecast to continue to increase 50 percent year-on-year. In both cases, one of the key factors in maximizing the investments being made into and out of China by these companies will be their top leadership team's ability to successfully operate in such a global environment.

While most organizations recognize that this type of leadership is needed in today's world, it also seems to be what is missing at the top. Overall the demand for successful global leaders has already outstripped the supply. Leadership Development has been a topic of interest for most organizations for many years, as they've worked on ways to develop more leaders who are able to bring great results to the organization. More recently, building on some of the cross-cultural research of the two past decades, several Universities and large organizations have started to more carefully examine the question – **What differentiates a truly global leader?** We know that in most cases, what has made some leaders successful in their home country may be quite different from what is required to make them successful as a global leader. A review of past and more recent models shows some common themes in the characteristics of successful global leaders, including: adaptability and tolerance for ambiguity, being open-minded and non-judgmental, having a true appreciation of diversity as an opportunity to learn, and an inquisitive orientation that helps establish trust with others.

In today's newsletter we'll delve a little deeper in exploring one of these characteristics - adaptability and tolerance for ambiguity. Stretching beyond our comfort zone usually goes along with this characteristic and is surely something required of all great leaders. However, what differentiates a truly global leader is that rather than merely being able to 'deal with' moving out of their comfort zone, they thrive and actively seek out experiences that will put them out of their comfort zone and force them to deal with high levels of ambiguity. In the practice of yoga, which is literally about stretching ourselves, it may initially seem that a particular stretch is impossible. Through the course of practice, stretching a little further, which may have initially seemed impossible, becomes possible. And that opens up a whole realm of possibilities for the practitioner – "If I can actually do this pose, then I can

probably do those other poses that seem impossible.” And as with most physical exercise, some level of discomfort is usually associated with stretching to new and higher levels of performance. Truly Global Leaders, not only are willing to accept this type of discomfort, but they are actually looking for it – knowing that it will open up a whole new realm of possibilities for them and ultimately help them reach their full potential. As the characteristics that differentiate successful global leaders become more in demand, it will become crucial for those in more junior and middle level positions to begin developing those characteristics early on. And as with most leadership capabilities, the best method for development is with practice. Here are some suggestions:

Powerful coaching questions to consider in assessing your own capacity to stretch yourself in the context of Global Leadership:

- What is a really bold action you could take toward one of your most important goals? What fears are holding you back from taking that action?
- What would it mean to make a radical shift in an area of your work or professional life where you feel you’ve been stuck for a while?
- Consider a problem you’ve been grappling with for some time. What are three new solutions to that problem that you have not considered yet (don’t be limited by coming up with things only solutions that seem feasible or easy to implement)?

Consider some actions you can take today to stretch yourself:

- Reach out to and make an appointment to meet with a leader who could be influential in helping you reach a key objective – even if you find the person or their role intimidating.
- Take on a work or extra-curricular project that will involve interacting with people from various cultural backgrounds on a regular basis.
- Replace one of your current daily activities or habits that you are fairly comfortable with, with a daily activity that feels like a bit of a stretch, but you know will help you achieve something you really want.

Future articles in the MDS Newsletter will further examine some of the other characteristics of successful global leaders – so please stay tuned!

Any comments or questions on this topic are welcomed – please send to [elisa@mdsbeijing.com](mailto:elisa@mdsbeijing.com)

#### References:

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