

# MEMBER CONTRIBUTED ARTICLE

## GLOBAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: A POINT OF VIEW

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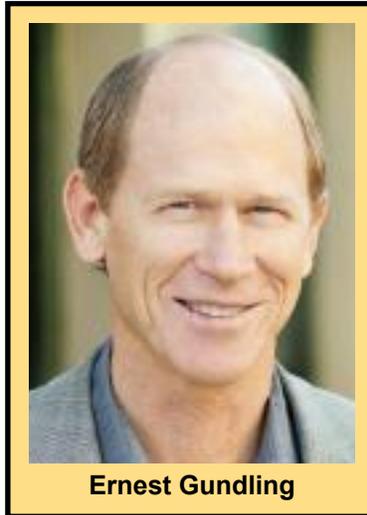
Your organization is planning to bring together leaders from around the world for a global leadership development program. A group of standout executives has been selected, and they will be spending a significant amount of time together in person. How will you structure the program to make the best possible use of this investment in such a precious learning opportunity?

Over the past several years we have had the privilege of partnering with large multinational companies on leadership programs for current and future global executives. These programs have increasingly taken place in fast-growth markets in Asia and the Middle East as well as in established markets. Such experiences have forced us to re-examine the question of what type of leaders organizations will need in the next three to ten years and whether standard development programs – held in hi-tech corporate learning centers with prestigious guest speakers – are truly the best recipe to prepare leaders for success in a business environment where the pace of change and level of complexity is relentlessly accelerating.

There are always issues of budget and resources, but from what we have seen, truly transformational programs that test participants' assumptions in a constructive way embody the following principles.

**Go to the front lines:** Where are your company's greatest growth prospects, customers with novel kinds of demands, your most dangerous competitors, or primary sources of supply? There is no substitute for experiencing such a market first-hand to fully grasp its significance and determine how best to engage, especially in a dynamic location where thousands of people are entering the middle class each day. Even when an executive's current job description is not directly tied to such a market, those who are moving to higher levels in the organization need to be able to strategize with a global perspective and are often in a position to support knowledge transfer, short- or long-term personnel exchanges, and other measures that will have a direct impact.

**Take the fish out of water:** There is an understandable tendency to provide high-ranking executive groups a learning experience



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with flawless logistics and a series of events that are carefully pre-planned and choreographed. In other words, the program facilitators seek a predictable, controlled, comfortable experience. Yet in order to create opportunities for personal and professional transformation, it is important to take people out of their comfort zone. Most seasoned executives are already incredibly capable when it comes to taking on complex tasks, breaking them down into manageable pieces, and implementing successfully. However, to be effective leaders at the next level, they often need to step aside from this dominant skill-set, look at the world with a broader perspective, and shift their priorities and leadership style to take into account the

changing economic landscape. For instance, do they understand how to assess disruptive forms of innovation that are occurring outside of their own home market? Can they anticipate major sources of risk or opportunity in new markets? Are they able to identify and cultivate talented individuals on the other side of the world who are not fluent in their preferred forms of communication and who accomplish tasks in very different ways? Transformative leadership programs challenge participants with these kinds of questions and allow them to consider and experiment with new responses.

**Connect people:** What makes the greatest impression on leadership program participants is not PowerPoint slides or polished tours – rather, it is the personal connections that they make with people who have vital messages to convey. Meetings with local employees, customers, suppliers, joint venture partners, government officials, and so on provide unique opportunities to see things through another's lens and to gain fresh insights into an unfamiliar market. Executives whose business travel typically consists of a string of hotels and meeting rooms are often thrilled at the chance to engage in deeper dialogue with counterparts in key global locations. These kinds of discussions frequently lead to future exchanges. They also lend new significance to the presence of participants in the leadership program who have special geographical expertise and personal networks. Instead of being outliers who are perhaps less fluent in the corporate lingo or less centrally positioned with headquarters, these individuals suddenly take on the role of trusted advisors with essential knowledge and experience from whom others in the group are now eagerly seeking to learn.

**Build mutual respect:** No matter how big the skill gaps between participants might be, each person has value to contribute: local expertise and contacts, knowledge of history and culture, eagerness to learn. We recently took part in a program located in the Middle East that included participants who had seen war, devastation, and shattered lives. Yet, despite their misfortune, they showed a hunger to grow that was an inspiration to everyone else. The underlying program tone must be one of respect and appreciation for diversity, even among people from the same country. Once participants get used to tapping the experience of people in the room, extraordinary human stories emerge from beneath a surface of corporate normalcy: individuals who have gone through huge social upheavals, who have had to struggle to find enough to eat, whose parents were blue collar workers or persecuted artists. The raw power of these exchanges builds true respect based on deeper understanding.

**Make it personal:** As much as leadership program participants value chances to learn about other markets, to think strategically together, and to identify future action

steps, they are also of course interested in themselves. They want to consider their own personal impact as leaders, including day-to-day behaviors, blind spots, and ideas they may be taking for granted. Multi-rater assessments and peer feedback are a common element in any leadership development program. A global program can provide a wider range of learning settings that challenge old habits and allow for experimentation with new behaviors, plus a more diverse set of participants, each of whom brings his or her own perspective. The power of learning through feedback from one's peers is easy to underestimate. With the right atmosphere of confidentiality and constructive candor, participants are likely to express awe at the level of mutual consideration, generosity, keen observation, and shared insight.

There are many elements and a particular kind of interpersonal magic that go into the creation of a successful global leadership program. The points outlined here can help to set the table for a dynamic series of interactions. The most important ingredients are brought by the participants themselves.



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