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October 2024

Also Inside

Shaping The Future
Of Asian Real Estate:
Insights From
Rusmin Lawin

Pg 32

Balancing Brands:
Tina Ghafurian's
Multi-Faceted
Leadership at Omorfia

Pg 40



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10
LEADING LEGAL STRATEGIES IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY: AN INTERVIEW WITH NAVDEEP CHOUDHARY

12
CRAFTING A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE: DR. BALAJI'S HR LEADERSHIP

14
ASIA'S LEADING BUSINESS FIGURES: DRIVING GROWTH AND INNOVATION IN 2024

26
INNOVATION MEETS SUSTAINABILITY: HAMUDI NAJAMI'S APPROACH TO MODERN INDUSTRIAL CONSTRUCTION

28
THE ACCIDENTAL ENTREPRENEUR: N. JAYAKUMAR'S UNCONVENTIONAL PATH TO FINANCIAL LEADERSHIP

32
SHAPING THE FUTURE OF ASIAN REAL ESTATE: INSIGHTS FROM RUSMIN LAWIN

34
REIMAGINING PLASTICS: SUDHAKAR PALLATH'S JOURNEY TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

42
BUILDING SUSTAINABLE DIGITAL WORLDS: AN INTERVIEW WITH AQUACITY FOUNDER VC LOW

6

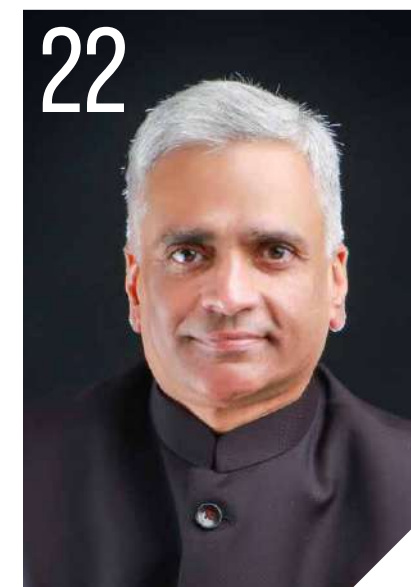
COVER STORY



COOKING UP SUCCESS: MOY TEO'S ENTREPRENEURIAL MASTERCLASS

As the visionary Director of Matrix Ingredients, **Moy Teo** has elevated a solo venture into a dominant force in the processed meat supply chain. Her leadership not only attracted a Dutch multinational but also culminated in a lucrative eight-figure acquisition in 2018. Beyond her corporate achievements, Teo is also a celebrated author of Find Your Destiny, where she unveils her blueprint for entrepreneurial success and personal fulfillment.

22



BRIDGING EXPERTISE GAPS: DR. CR PARTHASARATHY'S GEOTECHNICAL VISION

For over two decades, **Dr. CR Parthasarathy** has reshaped India's geotechnical landscape. As founder of Sarathy Geotech & Engineering Services,

38



SERVICE AT HEART: SUPHAJEE SUTHUMPUN'S CUSTOMER-CENTRIC APPROACH

Suphajee Suthumpun is the visionary Group CEO of Dusit International, Thailand's renowned hospitality giant. Taking the helm in 2016 with no prior industry experience.



GLOBAL Leaders TODAY

From the Editor

Dear Valued Readers,

It is with great pleasure that we present our highly anticipated "Asia's Leading Business Figures 2024" issue, a celebration of the visionaries and changemakers shaping the region's economic landscape.

Asia, a continent that has emerged as an icon of resilience and optimism, is being led by visionary leaders who are redefining the future of business. These trailblazers, with their bold strategies and steadfast commitment to progress, are driving Asia's remarkable transformation and its ascent to global leadership.

In this issue, we spotlight these influential leaders reshaping the landscape of success across the continent. From China's financial giants to India's and Southeast Asia's rapidly expanding markets, these individuals are setting new standards, forging innovative paths, and crafting the blueprint for sustainable business growth.

As organizations in Asia strive to boost productivity through technology, we explore how the most successful leaders recognize that their success hinges on more than just technological adoption. These visionaries understand that true productivity gains emerge from the synergy between technological innovation and human potential. They are investing not only in AI and cutting-edge technologies but also in work redesign, skills development, and aligning compensation with evolving job roles.

Through candid interviews and insightful analysis, you will gain valuable insights into how these leaders are successfully navigating the complex interplay of technology, human capital, and organizational trust.

As we look to the future, it's clear that Asia's business landscape will continue to be shaped by those who can strike the right balance between technological innovation and people-centric strategies. These leaders will drive their organizations—and indeed, the entire region—toward unprecedented growth and success.

Together, we will uncover the lessons learned from Asia's top business leaders and chart a path toward a brighter, more prosperous future for the region and the world. We invite you to join us in shaping the future of global business in Asia's ever-evolving landscape.

Warm regards,
Elena Arnaiz
 Editor-in-Chief,
 Global Leaders Today

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16

AKIO TOYODA: DRIVING INNOVATION AND HERITAGE AT TOYOTA

Akio Toyoda, the scion of Japan's illustrious Toyoda family, has revolutionized the automotive industry as the President and CEO of Toyota Motor Corporation.



40

BALANCING BRANDS: TINA GHAFURIAN'S MULTI-FACETED LEADERSHIP AT OMORFIA

Tina Ghafurian, COO of Omorfia Group, has played a vital role in transforming the beauty industry with brands like Tips & Toes, Bedashing, and Juice brand. With over two decades in the industry, she has progressed to become a leading figure, driven by her business insight and passion for innovation.



18

SUCCESSION PLANNING FOR YOUR BUSINESS: A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE

When planning for the future of your business, succession planning becomes crucial, especially if the business is a significant part of your legacy. Unlike personal wealth, which can be directly inherited, a business often requires careful consideration of who will manage and sustain it.



36

EMBRACING THE WINDS OF CHANGE: A NEW LEADER'S IMPERATIVE

Change is the only constant in life, and nowhere is this truer than in the dynamic realm of leadership. In the fast-paced world we navigate today, the ability to adapt is not just a skill; it's a necessity.



44

THROUGH THE CANOPY: HARNESSING MENTORSHIP TO SEE THE FULL SCOPE

Navigating challenges as a leader is never easy, but this is only further intensified if you are trying to push ahead with little or no support. This blinkered idea of leadership can quickly prevent you from seeing the wood through the trees.



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COOKING UP SUCCESS: MOY TEO'S ENTREPRENEURIAL MASTERCLASS

Written by Sherlyn Gomes

As the visionary Director of Matrix Ingredients, **Moy Teo** has elevated a solo venture into a dominant force in the processed meat supply chain. Her leadership not only attracted a Dutch multinational but also culminated in a lucrative eight-figure acquisition in 2018. Beyond her corporate achievements, Teo is also a celebrated author of *Find Your Destiny*, where she unveils her blueprint for entrepreneurial success and personal fulfillment.

In this exclusive interview, Teo offers a candid look into her journey of over two decades, revealing the challenges and triumphs that shaped her path. From navigating cash flow crises to building unshakeable business relationships, she unpacks the hard-earned lessons that fueled her rise to success.

What pivotal moments or obstacles did you face early on while starting Matrix Ingredients?

As a self-made entrepreneur, I started my journey from scratch. There are two types of entrepreneurs: those who inherit businesses and those, like me, who begin with nothing. Over 24 years ago, I launched my business as a one-woman show with no existing framework or legacy to rely on.

Cash flow was one of my biggest challenges. I chose not to borrow from banks, so every penny had to be generated through the business itself. As an agency and distribution house, my business relied heavily on moving goods. I had to buy and sell quickly, often operating with tight margins, making cash flow management essential.

To overcome this, I relied on credibility. I negotiated credit terms with

suppliers and pushed for upfront or shorter payment terms with customers, explaining that I was a startup. This delicate balance of buying, selling, and reinvesting profits allowed me to scale gradually. Every profit returned to the business to acquire new agencies and build stronger industry relationships. It was a slow, compound process that enabled sustainable growth without overextending.

Looking back, several pivotal moments shaped my career. Early on, significant orders from key clients gave my business the momentum it needed to grow. On the supplier side, multinational brands entrusted me with their agencies, providing the support I needed to establish a market foothold. These partnerships were vital to my success, and I credit much of my growth to the trust and confidence these suppliers placed in me, even when I was inexperienced.

I believe these two key decisions—focusing on a unique market and never losing sight of my goal—led to our success. After years of hard work, it finally became a reality, and they were delighted with the platform we had built.



It is essential to think big, have a clear vision, and ignore the naysayers. Success ultimately depends on how hard you're willing to work toward your goals.

What unique aspects of Matrix Ingredients contributed to its appeal and value, leading to its acquisition?

Every company, big or small, has its unique qualities. For my company, it was clear from day one what that would be. My goal was to create a one-stop supply chain for the processed meat and seafood industry. That has been my sole focus, and my objective has always been to make it to the top 1% in our field.

It took years to bring on key agencies and grow the revenue and customer base. Given that we're in food ingredients, there are two main segments: commodities like salt, MSG, and rice, which have high volume but low margins, and specialty ingredients, which require technical knowledge and expertise. From the start, I knew my strategy had to be focused on the specialty side, avoiding the commodity market.

This approach is inspired by the concept of the "Blue Ocean" strategy—focusing on a market with less competition. By tapping into the niche area of specialty ingredients, we naturally achieved higher margins and faced less competition since few have the expertise to operate in this space.

By building this one-stop supply chain and focusing on a niche market, I grew the business substantially with healthy margins. This success caught the attention of the IMCD Group, who were interested in acquiring us. At the end of the day, business is about profit and loss. To attract big corporate buyers, you need substantial revenue and a solid P/E ratio. They saw in us what they were missing and knew they could scale further using our resources.



I believe these two key decisions—focusing on a unique market and never losing sight of my goal—led to our success. After years of hard work, it finally became a reality, and they were delighted with the platform we had built.

Can you share how you foster relationships and how they have contributed to the Matrix Ingredient's success?

Credibility is the foundation of any business, just like in personal relationships. Whether dealing with customers, suppliers, or partners, keeping your word and honoring commitments is essential. In my 24 years in business, many major deals were secured with a handshake, built on trust and the promise to deliver. This, I believe, is the core of our success.

To build strong relationships, you must earn trust, showing customers and suppliers that you can deliver and grow together. Many of my customers from over 20 years ago still work with me today, mainly because I'm open, transparent, and straightforward. I don't sugarcoat or make unrealistic promises; I tell them what can and cannot be done.

Setting realistic expectations is crucial. It's better to underpromise and overdeliver than vice versa, as broken promises can damage both personal and company reputations. I've always been deeply committed to my customers—whether it's handling a late-night request or an urgent issue, I don't limit myself to "office hours." Building lasting relationships takes consistent effort and dedication.

Trust is built over time through collaboration and understanding. My customers know they can rely on me because I prioritize transparency and consistency. I also listen to their feedback and remain open to change. Being too rigid or unwilling to adapt can alienate those you work with, which I see as a major red flag.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life balance?

This question deeply resonates with me because it reflects the reality many entrepreneurs face. In my late 20s, the stress was immense as I started my business with no money and limited resources. I couldn't afford a large team; the first five years were extremely tough. I worked 16 to 18 hours a day, often without even realizing it, because

I was so passionate about what I was building. To make things more challenging, I had four young children to care for, so I was constantly juggling motherhood and business. Balance simply wasn't possible in those early years.

Over 20 years later, I can now proudly say I have a balanced life. Discipline has always been key for me, and it's helped maintain that balance as I've grown in my career. For the past 14 years, I've made it a point to exercise daily, spending one to two hours at the gym unless I'm on a business trip.

I also nurture my mind by reading a wide range of books—on finance, marketing, biographies, cooking, and philosophy. This habit, which I've developed over the years, helps keep me grounded.

Another part of my routine is healthy eating. I prepare my lunch daily, which is rare for most Singaporeans who usually eat out. I also prioritize cooking for my family, especially on weekdays. No matter how busy I get, my commitment to my family and well-being remains strong.

Self-care is also crucial. Once a week, I treat myself to a spa day, whether a massage or sauna, to help me unwind. These moments are essential, especially after years of hard work. Now in my 50s, I realize how vital it is to maintain a healthy mind and body. This is important not just for today but also as I think about passing my legacy to the next generation.

How do you envision the food ingredient industry evolving in 5-10 years?

The food industry is inherently stable and sustainable because food is a daily necessity. Unlike rapidly changing sectors like social media or advertising, the food industry will evolve gradually. However, over the next five to 10 years, we'll likely see shifts driven by growing environmental concerns. People are becoming more aware of how their food choices impact the planet, especially regarding meat consumption. This is fueling a push toward plant-based diets and the growth of the vegan industry as a solution to reduce environmental harm.

The transition to cleaner, more sustainable food will take time. Many products, particularly in developing regions, still rely on chemicals, fertilizers, and ultra-processed methods to meet demand. While people understand the health risks of ultra-processed foods, their consumption continues to rise due to convenience and

affordability. As much as there's a desire for clean, organic food, it will take years to achieve a complete shift globally.

Matrix Ingredients aims to play a significant role in this evolving landscape by focusing on sustainability, meeting the growing demand for healthier, more environmentally friendly food options, and recognizing the industry's practical challenges.

What do you think are the qualities required for entrepreneurial success?

Two qualities are paramount to succeeding as an entrepreneur: focus and discipline. Focus means having a clear vision every day—to build the business, grow your client base, and expand steadily. Discipline, on the other hand, is about enduring the inevitable hardships. Entrepreneurship is a rollercoaster, and it's the ability to persist, stay committed, and believe in yourself that truly sets successful entrepreneurs apart.

Equally important is maintaining a "golden circle"—a close, reliable network of suppliers, customers, and partners. While it may seem limiting, it helps me stay focused and ensures I'm surrounded by people who share my vision and can support my growth.

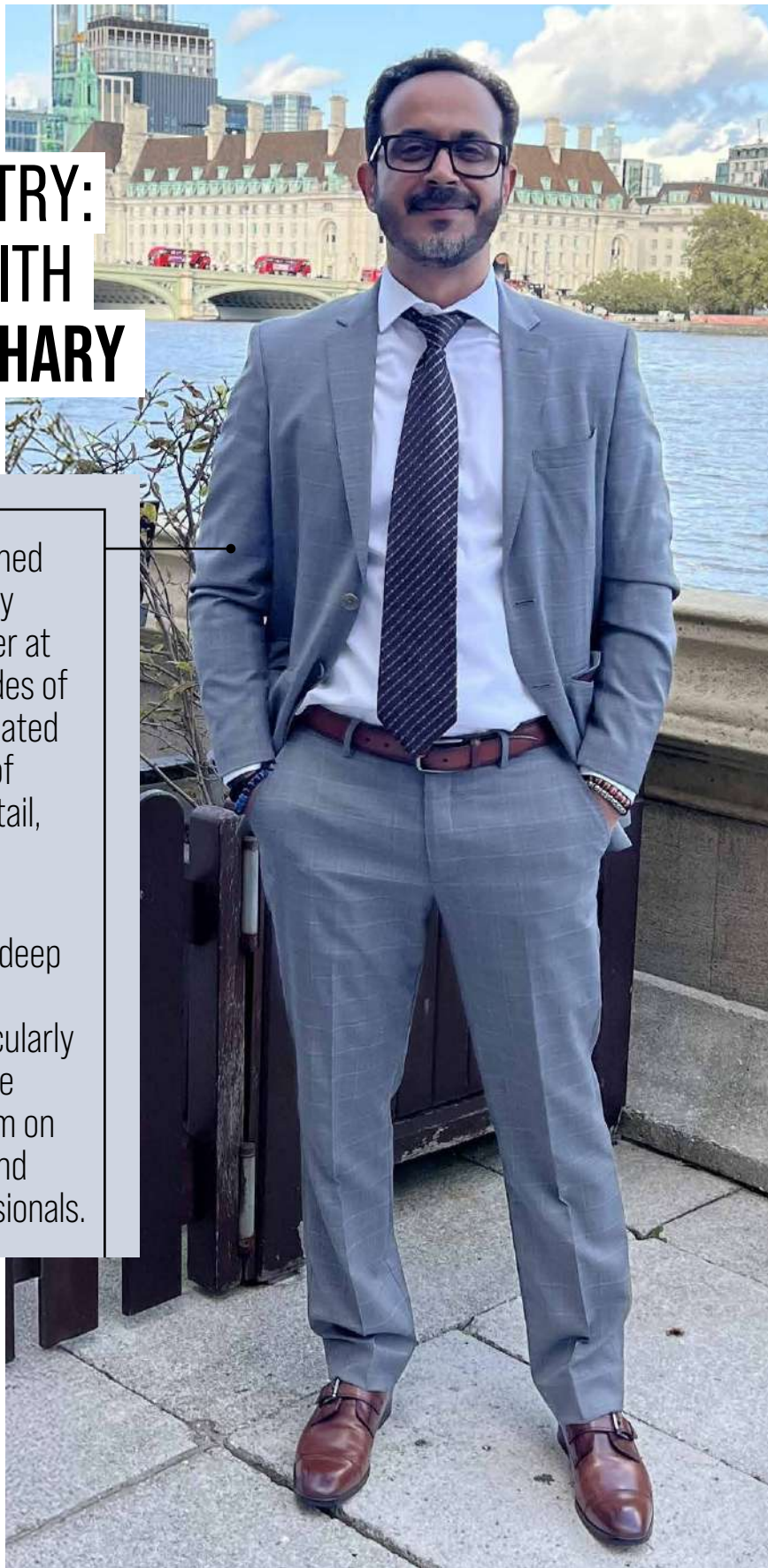
For me, entrepreneurship is also about fulfilling one's purpose, or dharma. I wanted to share my journey because I believe in giving back and helping the next generation of entrepreneurs. Young entrepreneurs must understand that the first five to ten years will be challenging. The road isn't easy, but with passion, resilience, and confidence, overcoming any obstacle is possible.

It is essential to think big, have a clear vision, and ignore the naysayers. Success ultimately depends on how hard you're willing to work toward your goals. By sharing my experiences, I hope to inspire others to persevere, achieve their dreams, and surpass my accomplishments. That's why I'm here—to share, inspire, and encourage others to stay the course and succeed.



LEADING LEGAL STRATEGIES IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY: AN INTERVIEW WITH NAVDEEP CHOUDHARY

Written by Kyle Goldberg



Navdeep Choudhary is a seasoned legal professional who currently serves as the Chief Legal Officer at Yum India. With over two decades of experience, Navdeep has navigated the intricate legal landscapes of various industries, including retail, insurance, and quick-service restaurants.

In this insightful interview, Navdeep offers his perspectives on the evolving legal landscape, particularly within the dynamic food service industry, and shares his wisdom on effective team management and advice for aspiring legal professionals.

What initially sparked your interest in law, and how did you find your passion?

From a young age, I was captivated by the world of law, with courtroom dramas in movies sparking my interest. This fascination only deepened during my college years. Seeing accomplished lawyers address us and witnessing their significant impact on society profoundly inspired me.

Their ability to influence and add value to our communities was truly admirable. This growing respect for the profession ultimately led me to pursue a career in law.

Could you walk us through your career trajectory and highlight some pivotal moments or experiences that have shaped it?

My first role was at India's Clothing Limited, where I was the inaugural hire for their legal department. I managed legalities for two factories, handling contracts, litigation, and policy development. I established the contract management process and internal compliance policies, boosting my confidence in building effective systems from scratch. I have dealt with and ensured settlements in a large-scale cross-border litigation.

I then joined Shoppers Stop Limited, managing lease agreements and real estate transactions and directly negotiating with top builders. I then moved to Canara HSBC OBC Life insurance Company Limited, overseeing compliance, contract management, and litigation for their insurance joint venture, contributing significantly to their operational framework.

Returning to Shoppers Stop, I spent six years spearheading expansion of Shoppers Stop, Hypercity, Mac, Clinique and Estee Lauder in North and East India, handling critical negotiations, policy making and large scale litigation. Then, at Jubilant FoodWorks, the master franchisee for Domino's in India, I led a large legal team, managed extensive legal issues including engagement with policy makers and industry bodies across India Sub Continent, and worked closely in setting up a joint venture in Bangladesh.

I have been at Yum India for seven years, navigating the legal, compliance and governance complexities of a global multinational corporation. As the company's FCPA guardian, I ensure compliance with FCPA regulations and oversee contract and litigation management along with compliance, secretarial and franchisee governance verticals. I have supported both the franchisees on their IPO journey, crafting the prospectus and helping them effectively maneuver the necessary compliance requirements before they went public. I implemented an in-house contract management system, integrated digital tools like Mike Legal for document

vetting, and established a digital signature platform, streamlining our processes. Support on strategy and documentation to buy equity stake within a franchisee and ensuring the sale of the same with a good margin afterward was a great experience. I also established a companywide risk management framework and overhauled all the processes on the secretarial side for better management of board-level decisions.

What challenges have you faced in ensuring legal compliance?

The food industry is incredibly dynamic. Previously regulated under the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, which focused on criminal prosecution, the sector has seen a significant shift with the introduction of the Food Safety Act and the establishment of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). Now, companies can engage directly with the regulator to shape policies and address concerns.

This new regulatory environment allows constant updates and changes, making compliance exciting and challenging. Social media adds another layer of complexity, as any customer can act as a food safety inspector, potentially impacting our reputation instantly. We have robust crisis management protocols to address customer concerns swiftly, maintaining our hard-earned goodwill.

We also work closely with regulators, franchisees, and industry bodies to ensure proper policies and guardrails are in place. The industry demands constant innovation, from core products to digital infrastructure. I played a key role in enhancing our digital presence by negotiating with vendors and drafting relevant documentation for our website and mobile app for both KFC and Pizza Hut brands.

Additionally, I actively contribute to industry-wide initiatives, sharing insights with peers, authorities, and competitors to address common challenges. This collaborative approach ensures positive outcomes for the entire industry.

Looking ahead, what are the future trends or challenges in the legal landscape, particularly within the food service industry?

The food industry is evolving rapidly, with the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) spearheading the drive for stricter standards. Over the past few

years, we've seen a significant increase in standardized processes, which provide clarity for compliance and ensure food safety. This proactive approach by the FSSAI is crucial for maintaining hygiene and customer satisfaction, especially in the quick-service restaurant (QSR) sector.

To stay ahead in this changing landscape, it's essential to remain agile and adapt to new regulations and customer preferences. By investing in robust infrastructure, processes, and digital technologies, we can effectively meet evolving compliance requirements and address emerging challenges, such as privacy regulations. Our proactive compliance measures position us well to navigate future regulatory changes and uphold industry standards.

How has your journey from individual contributor to executive leader shaped your view on the importance of team management for organizational success?

As you climb the career ladder, effective team management becomes increasingly critical. Reflecting on my journey from an individual contributor to an executive leader, I've learned the importance of nurturing talent and building cohesive teams.

Ensuring that teams are well-equipped with the right talent, tools, and support is essential for success. As the company and department grow, so does the responsibility to foster their development. Mentoring and guidance are vital to empowering individuals to reach their full potential and drive organizational success.

Given your extensive experience, what advice would you offer aspiring legal professionals?

For new entrants, clarity of goals is paramount. Understanding your aspirations and aptitudes is crucial in choosing the right path, whether in private practice, judiciary, or in-house counsel. Seeking guidance from seasoned professionals can provide valuable insights and clarity.

Once you've identified your goals, hard work and persistence are essential. Put in the effort, equip yourself with the necessary knowledge and tools, build an effective network, and stay focused on your Northstar. With determination and guidance, success is within reach.



CRAFTING A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE: DR. BALAJI'S HR LEADERSHIP

Written by Alexis Miller

Dr. Balaji M. S., the Group CHRO at Critical Facility Group Singapore and a distinguished HR thought leader with over 26 years of experience, has driven innovation and excellence in HR across industries. As a Global Transformation Engineer, he has shaped organizational culture through his expertise in Human Capital Strategy, Leadership Development, and Organizational Transformation.

In this profile, we explore his HR journey, the impact of his international exposure, and the strategic initiatives that have fostered talent development and a culture of trust. Dr. Balaji's insights offer a blueprint for creating engaged and innovative workplaces in today's evolving business landscape.

Could you walk us through some key milestones in your journey?

TVS Electronics, my first company, deeply shaped my HR journey. Its core values—Customer Centricity, People First, and Leadership by Example—aligned me with a new-age HR mindset. During my formative years, I had the privilege of learning from industry legends like CK Prahalad and Japanese scientists Prof. Wasio and Prof. Tsuda, which broadened my perspective and refined my expertise. Mr. Gopal Srinivasan, Chairman of TVS Electronics,

greatly influenced my commitment to people and customer-centricity.

His foresight in embracing digitization over two decades ago inspired my innovative approach to HR.

At Siemens, I learned the importance of scaling ideas and embraced the mantra "Engagement brings Effectiveness." Mentors like Mr. Sai Ramesh, who introduced me to coaching, and my current Chairman at CFG, Mr. Andrew Mui, continue to shape my thinking. Other influential figures, including BN Nagaraj (TVSE), Mr. Kailas Nadkarni (Siemens), and Dr. Ganesh Natarajan (ex-CEO, Zensar Technologies), have left a lasting impact on my approach to leadership.

Siemens also gave me invaluable experience in large-scale transformation. I honed my skills in adapting global strategies to local contexts, particularly during mergers and acquisitions, where I focused on cultural integration and M&A-related

communication. Leading the design and implementation of the "New Performance Management System" with nine capabilities was a pivotal learning moment.

Throughout my career at TVSE, Siemens, Professional Access, and now at CF Group, I've led Culture Rejuvenation initiatives, emphasizing cross-business collaboration, values in action, and leadership development through upward feedback mechanisms.

One of the most impactful strategies I've employed is my 26-year career plan: the first decade focused on continuous learning, the second on leadership and driving organizational impact, and the third on coaching and nurturing future leaders. This vision, guided by mentors, has been central to my growth and contributions in HR.

My goal is to inspire my team to dream big and push beyond their limits while fostering creativity and productive debate that leads to the best solutions.

How has your international exposure influenced your approach to HR practices and organizational development?

I've had the privilege of working with global companies like TVS Electronics, Siemens, Professional Access-Zensar Technologies, and now Critical Facility Group, based in Singapore, with operations in China, Japan, Thailand, Brunei, Malaysia, and India.

A key lesson I've learned is the importance of adapting global strategies to local contexts. Implementing people strategies across different countries requires understanding local nuances while maintaining international standards.

I've also realized that stakeholder expectations are demanding in a global setting. To meet them, I've customized HR practices while ensuring they align with international benchmarks. This has allowed me to deploy best practices across countries while also creating 'next practices'—innovative approaches that go beyond the norm.

Cultural integration has been a core focus, especially in post-merger situations. A successful integration brings together different organizational cultures, creating a unified vision.

How do you integrate coaching into your leadership style?

The organizational landscape is rapidly evolving. The focus has shifted toward short-term results and digital transformation in recent years. Structures have moved from vertical hierarchies to more horizontal models, and employees are seeking new work norms, such as remote work and four-day workweeks. Leadership is now under a microscope, with increasing scrutiny on how leaders navigate challenges, making their role in value creation more critical than ever.

Companies are now focused on building talent houses, with employees and employers aiming to create meaningful brands. There has been a significant mindset shift from "loyalty association" to "accountability association," where the emphasis is no longer on task completion but on developing multi-skilled employees.

With these changes, coaching at every level has become essential. Personally, I am a strong advocate of reverse coaching and feedback. My experience in coaching, particularly in succession planning, was gratifying. Over two years, I helped prepare top talent at the N-4 level (Managers) to assume business head roles (N-2 level) while also coaching senior leaders on behavioral changes—a truly enriching journey.

Can you share some insights into the trends shaping the future of HR?

It's intriguing to think about how quickly norms can evolve. In 2017, the idea of working from home as a standard practice seemed far-fetched, but today, it's a common reality. In this fast-paced environment, digital tools are essential for effective HR management.

A key trend is the growing need for continuous upskilling and reskilling. As technologies like AI, ML, and blockchain advance, ensuring the workforce stays relevant is critical. HR's role has shifted from traditional personnel management to strategic talent development, focusing on future-proofing the workforce.

Data analytics is also becoming vital. I advocate for data-driven decision-making using dashboards and scorecards, though a challenge remains in turning data into actionable insights.

Another key focus is selecting and developing the right talent. As work becomes more complex, identifying individuals for leadership roles and P&L responsibilities becomes increasingly challenging. Mentoring and continuous feedback help address this.

Finally, effective performance measurement goes beyond hitting targets—it's about understanding the nuances. I believe in combining data with qualitative insights and focusing on recognizing positive behaviors. HR's role is not just to build capable employees but also to create a positive and happy work environment, which boosts motivation and productivity for the long term.



Finally, what are your aspirations for the future of HR leadership?

HR leadership must explore new ways to harmonize people and technology as our business evolves and reimagines its future. The challenge is to inspire individuals to reach their full potential while achieving organizational goals. This requires us to embrace innovative working methods and motivate teams in ways that create long-term value. I believe the key lies in rethinking organizational values, embracing emerging technologies, and adopting new talent models. Social listening will become integral to organizations, and developing future-ready competencies like risk management, data literacy, and financial acumen will be crucial. All of this will require significant investment in leadership development.

The role I aim to play is one where I deeply understand the business, allowing me to design strategies that drive impactful results. I want to build trusting relationships to effectively coach others to perform at their best. My goal is to inspire my team to dream big and push beyond their limits while fostering creativity and productive debate that leads to the best solutions.

I believe skilled HR professionals are well-equipped to take on business leadership roles. With their understanding of people, processes, policies, and systems, assuming broader business leadership is a natural progression. In the future, I see myself leading not just HR but the business as a whole.



Asia's Leading Business Figures: Driving Growth and Innovation in 2024

Written by Elena Arnaiz

As organizations in Asia strive to boost productivity through technology, their success hinges on more than just technological adoption—it depends on their ability to adapt people strategies and build employee trust. Only by addressing these human elements can they fully harness the potential of new technologies and achieve meaningful productivity gains.

The most successful leaders in Asia recognize this need for a holistic approach to business transformation. They invest not only in AI and cutting-edge technologies but also in work redesign, skills development, and aligning compensation with evolving job roles. These leaders understand that true productivity gains emerge from the synergy between technological innovation and human potential.

Amid these challenges, Asia emerges as a beacon of resilience and optimism, led by visionary leaders who are redefining the future of business. With bold strategies and a steadfast commitment to progress, these trailblazers are driving Asia's remarkable transformation and its ascent to global leadership.

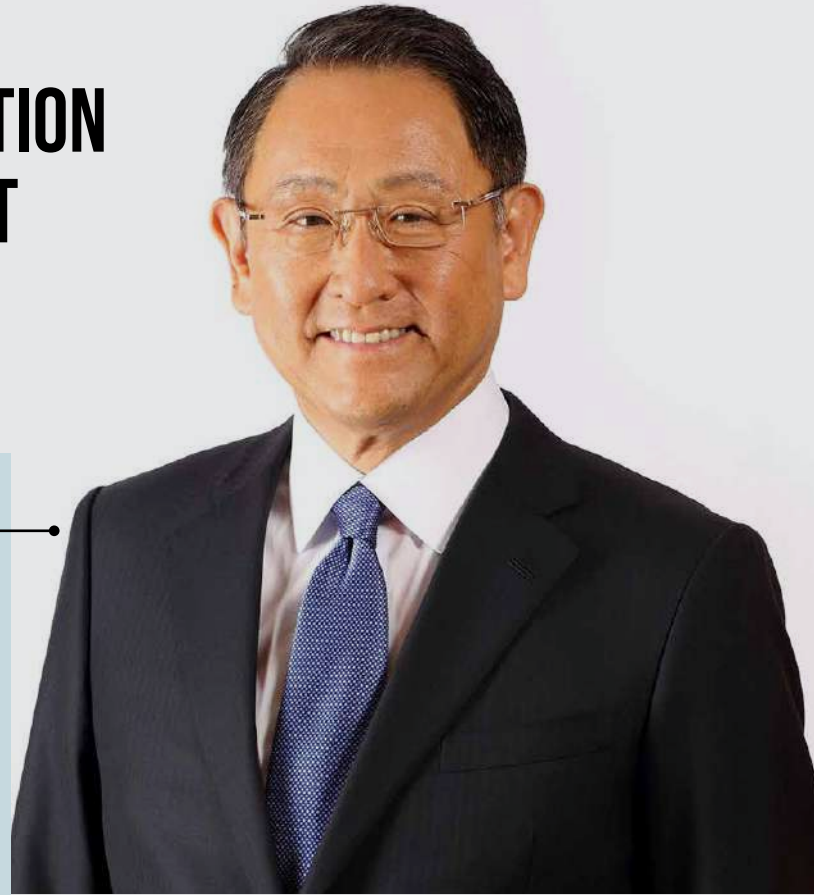
In "Asia's Leading Business Figures 2024," we turn the spotlight on these influential leaders who are reshaping the landscape of success across the continent. From China's financial giants to India's and Southeast Asia's rapidly expanding markets, these individuals are setting new standards, forging innovative paths, and crafting the blueprint for sustainable business growth.

As we look to the future, it's clear that Asia's business landscape will continue to be shaped by those who can successfully navigate the complex interplay of technology, human capital, and organizational trust. The leaders who can strike the right balance between technological innovation and people-centric strategies will be the ones who drive their organizations—and indeed, the entire region—toward unprecedented growth and success.

Through candid interviews and insightful analysis, we celebrate the achievements of these remarkable individuals. Join us as we uncover the lessons learned from Asia's top business leaders and chart a path toward a brighter, more prosperous future for the region and the world. Together, we will shape the future of global business in Asia's ever-evolving landscape.

AKIO TOYODA: DRIVING INNOVATION AND HERITAGE AT TOYOTA

Written by Alexis Miller



Akio Toyoda, the scion of Japan's illustrious Toyoda family, has revolutionized the automotive industry as the President and CEO of Toyota Motor Corporation. His leadership is marked by a commitment to innovation and a deep respect for Toyota's legacy, driving the company through cultural reform and strategic evolution. As Toyota's torchbearer, Toyoda has not only honored his family's heritage but has also steered the company into a dynamic future, reinforcing Toyota's position as a global automotive leader.

built. "I was always told I wasn't up to the task," Toyoda reflects, alluding to the immense pressure of living up to the Toyoda name.

After obtaining a bachelor's degree from the prestigious Keio University, Toyoda ventured to the United States, earning an MBA from Babson College. Armed with a diverse educational background and a deep understanding of global business practices, he joined Toyota in 1984, determined to forge his own path within the family business.

"For many years, I had a dilemma," Toyoda recalls. "People would tell me I should never talk

about the family. It was very strange because it was a simple fact that I was born into the family. But they told me not to talk about it." This early directive to downplay his lineage would later give way to a more open and personal approach as Toyoda embraced his role as the torchbearer of the Toyoda legacy.

Transforming Toyota's Corporate Culture

Toyoda's rise through the ranks was marked by a deep understanding of every facet of Toyota's operations, from marketing and production to product development, both in Japan and internationally. His vast experience and keen strategic vision ultimately led to his appointment as President and CEO in 2009, at the height of the global financial crisis.

"When I became president, we had something called a global master plan," Toyoda explains. "The head office had plotted out how much would be allocated to which region. To me, this felt disrespectful. In each region, we have people creating a base for the Toyota brand, engaging with customers every day to be the best in town."

Toyoda's bold approach to leadership quickly became evident as he sought to redefine Toyota's priorities, focusing on the needs of local markets and empowering regional teams to drive innovation. "I want

"Three of them have been inducted into the U. S. Automotive Hall of Fame: Eiji, Shoichiro, and Kiichiro," Toyoda proudly proclaims. "That is to say, society highly recognizes the contributions of these three gentlemen. I'm working so hard to repay those founding generations."

to reward people who are passionate and make an effort to convey the faces and needs of customers," he states.

Under Toyoda's stewardship, Toyota has weathered numerous challenges, from the global recession to high-profile safety recalls. Yet, it is during these trials that his true mettle has shone through. "I had to start with reforming the company culture to

set the stage for the future," Toyoda reflects. "By the time I pass the baton to the next-generation president, I hope this cultural reform is completed so they can start sharply focused on the future from day one."

Embracing the Toyoda Legacy

As the torchbearer of the Toyoda name, Toyoda has not only reclaimed his family's proud history but also infused it with a renewed sense of purpose – one that will undoubtedly shape the future of the automotive industry for generations to come.

"Three of them have been inducted into the U.S. Automotive Hall of Fame: Eiji, Shoichiro, and Kiichiro," Toyoda proudly proclaims. "That is to say, society highly recognizes the contributions of these three gentlemen. I'm working so hard to repay those founding generations."

Toyoda's decision to embrace his family's legacy represents a significant shift in Toyota's corporate culture. Rather than viewing the Toyoda name as a burden, he has come to see it as a source of strength and inspiration, guiding him as he navigates the challenges of leading one of the world's most influential automakers.

"I told my son, 'You don't have to hide the family because it's part of yourself, part of who you are,'" Toyoda says. "If people ask, you can say it. You can take pride in it."

This newfound openness has allowed Toyoda to forge a more personal connection

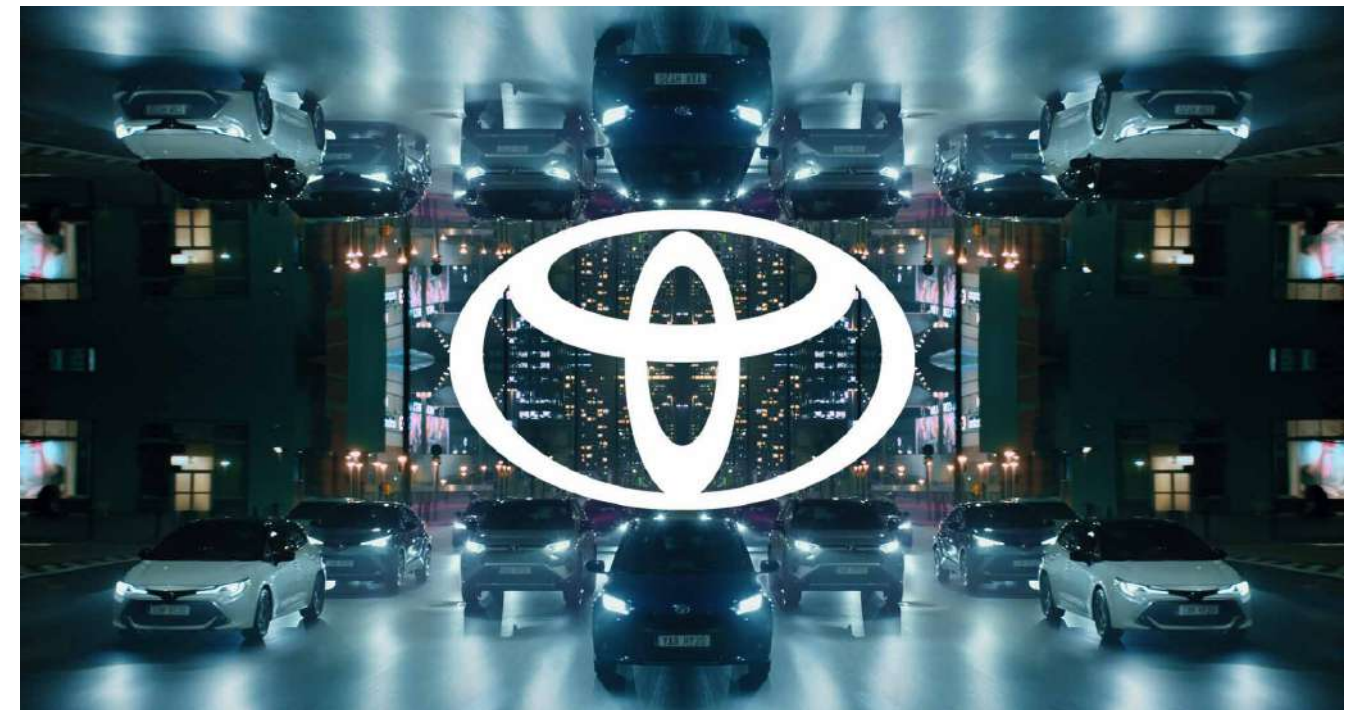
with both his employees and Toyota's customers, humanizing the company's image and positioning him as a transformative leader rather than a faceless corporate executive.

Driving Toyota's Future

As Toyota navigates the rapidly evolving automotive landscape, Akio Toyoda remains at the forefront, steering the company towards a future defined by innovation, sustainability, and a deep connection with customers. With an unwavering commitment to honor his family's legacy, Toyoda is propelling Toyota into uncharted territory.

"My mission now is to lay the groundwork so that my successor can sprint from the starting blocks," Toyoda declares with determination. "I had to start with reforming the company culture to set the stage for the future. I hope this cultural reform is completed by the time I pass the baton to the next-generation president so they can focus sharply on the challenges ahead."

Under Toyoda's visionary leadership, Toyota is poised to grow beyond its illustrious past and embrace a bold new era. As the torchbearer of the Toyoda name, he has not only reclaimed his family's proud history but also infused it with a renewed sense of purpose – one that will undoubtedly shape the future of the automotive industry for generations to come.



SUCCESSION PLANNING FOR YOUR BUSINESS: A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE

Written by contributing writer **Stuart Ritchie**



not, necessitating a clear strategy for future management to sustain the business's value and growth.

Case Study: The Goodwood Legacy

The Goodwood Estate, managed by the Dukes of Richmond and Gordon, exemplifies effective succession planning. The late tenth Duke and his son, then called Lord March, revived the Estate's motor racing circuit in the 1990s. Today, Goodwood is renowned for its diverse activities, including motor racing, golf, horse racing, and hosting events. This successful transition illustrates the importance of an entrepreneurial mindset and careful planning.

The Entrepreneurial Cycle

Business owners typically progress from an initial idea to building a substantial and self-sustaining enterprise. As they age, often in their mid to late fifties, their focus shifts from growth to succession planning. Questions about where to begin, who to trust, and how to handle family dynamics become central.

Forming an Advisory Panel

A useful step is to form an advisory panel comprising both internal and external members to provide an objective assessment. This panel helps in making informed decisions about family members' roles, ensuring they are appointed based on merit, not just family ties. Experience outside the family business can be beneficial for family members to bring fresh perspectives.

External Appointments

Appointing an external CEO can sometimes be the best option, ensuring professional management while family members continue to benefit. Incentivising the CEO with equity stakes can align their interests with the business's success.

Timing the Transition

Determining the right time for the business owner to step aside is crucial. This decision should be accompanied by transparency with the family and an established plan for the business's future management. A family constitution can formalise policies on ownership, management, remuneration, and dispute resolution.



About the author:

Stuart Ritchie is an expert tax advisor with over 30 years of experience in the field who founded his own accountancy firm Ritchie Phillips LLP in 2003, through which he provides specialist taxation and accountancy services. Ritchie is also a fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW), a member of the Chartered Institute of Taxation, and a chair of the ICAEW Tax Faculty Private Client Committee. This provides him with a unique insight into the developments and trends within the world of high-net-worth and ultra-high-net-worth individuals.

When planning for the future of your business, succession planning becomes crucial, especially if the business is a significant part of your legacy. Unlike personal wealth, which can be directly inherited, a business often requires careful consideration of who will manage and sustain it. This article focuses on determining who will inherit your business and how to ensure its continued success.

Key Considerations in Succession Planning

For business owners, especially those in the first generation of ownership, two primary questions arise:

1. Who will inherit the value of the business?
2. Who will take on the responsibility of running the business?

These may not always be the same person. Some family members might contribute significantly to the business, while others do



Meticulous Planning

Open communication with family and advisors is vital to avoid surprises. Having a trusted confidant outside the board who can offer unbiased advice on financial and legal matters is equally important. This critical friend can help structure the business for future success.

Framework for Discussions

The family constitution should address key areas:

- Ownership and policy setting
- Day-to-day management
- Ownership options for family members
- Policies for family members who wish to withdraw
- Remuneration and dividend policies
- Dispute resolution mechanisms

If selling the business becomes necessary, a mechanism should be in place to respect family decisions, ensuring a majority consensus.

Advance Planning

The timing of succession planning varies based on the business owner’s readiness and

external opportunities. Selling the business to a third party might sometimes be the best option, especially if it opens new growth avenues. Conversely, some businesses are closely tied to the owner’s personality and might need to continue under their leadership until the end.

Options for Passing on the Business

For those deciding to pass the business to their children, there are two main approaches:

1. Transfer shareholdings directly.
2. Set up a trust fund to manage the shareholding.

Preparing the Successor

If the preferred successor is not ready, appointing an external interim leader while the successor gains experience can be effective. Sensitivity and respect towards the interim leader are essential to ensure a smooth transition.

Case Study: Timpson’s Upside-Down Management

John Timpson’s succession plan involved handing control of his business to his son, James, in 2002. James continued the ‘upside-down’ management style, crucial for the business’s growth. This example underscores the importance of maintaining the founder’s values and management style.

Individualised Approach

Succession planning is highly personalised, dependent on individual circumstances, relationships, and accumulated wealth. It is essential to address each stage thoughtfully, ensuring a smooth transition.

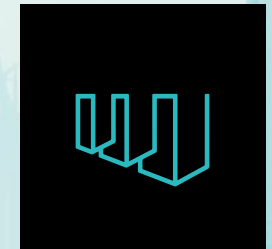
Conclusion

Now might be the time to start those essential conversations about succession planning. Deciding who will inherit and manage your business ensures that your legacy continues successfully and your family benefits from the wealth you have created. Planning early and meticulously will help secure your business’s future and protect your family’s interests.



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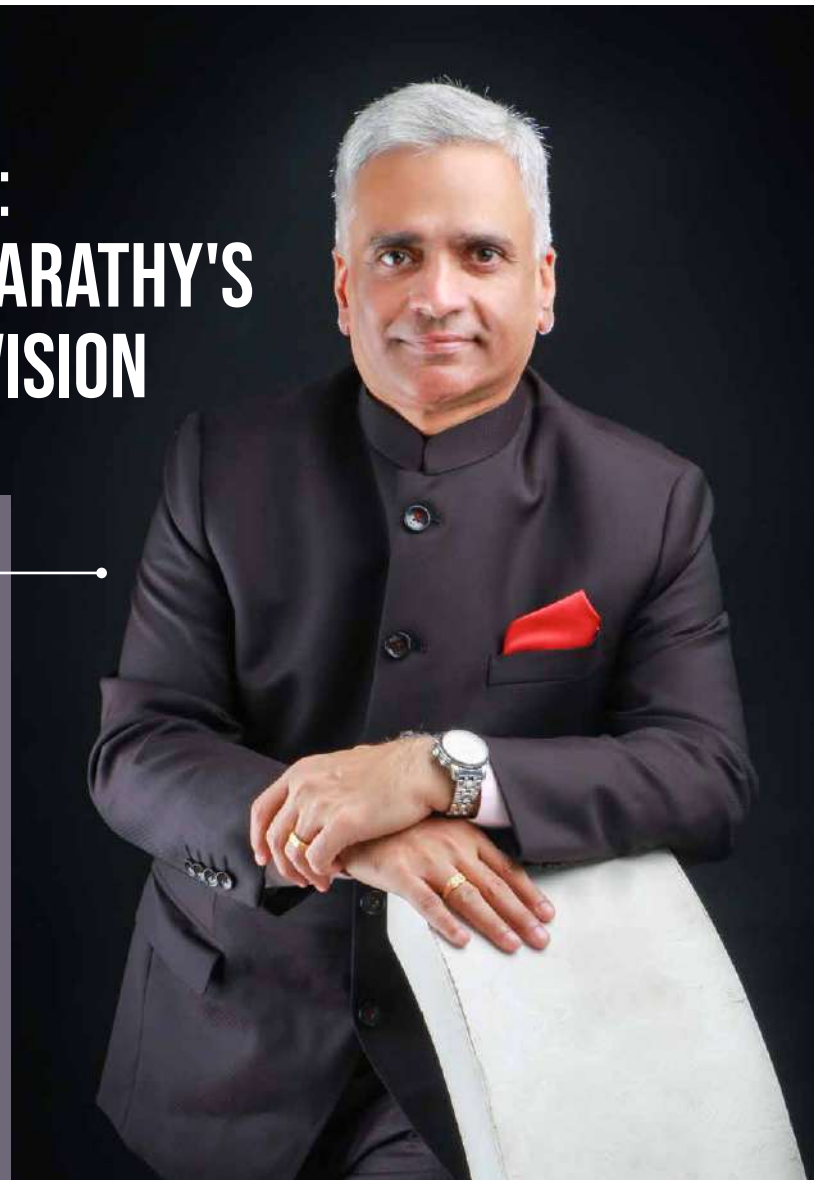
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BRIDGING EXPERTISE GAPS: DR. CR PARTHASARATHY'S GEOTECHNICAL VISION

Written by Elena Arnaiz



For over two decades, Dr. CR Parthasarathy has reshaped India's geotechnical landscape. As founder of Sarathy Geotech & Engineering Services, he built a leading firm that filled a crucial industry gap, combining entrepreneurial vision with technical expertise to elevate geotechnical services nationwide.

In this candid interview, Dr. Parthasarathy takes us on a journey from his early days as a lone geotechnical investigator to his current role as a respected industry figure. With warmth and wisdom, he shares his challenges, the risks he took, and the vision that drove him to create a company rooted in solid values and technical excellence.

Can you share a project in your early career that solidified your passion for geotechnical engineering?

Early in my career, I embraced a solitary role in geotechnical investigation within the real estate sector. This position put me

at the forefront of challenging projects, especially those involving foundation and deep excavation. Confronting these complexities on my own honed my skills and expanded my understanding of the field. This invaluable experience was instrumental in igniting my passion for geotechnical engineering, as it enabled me to cultivate a robust foundation in addressing engineering problems and solidified my commitment to advancing in this specialized discipline.

What motivated you to found Sarathy Geotech & Engineering Services Pvt Ltd. in 2007?

Approximately sixteen years ago, India lacked dedicated geotechnical consulting

services, leading to a significant dependency on international consultants, particularly within the oil and gas sector. Recognizing this substantial gap in the market, I was inspired to establish an organization capable of addressing these industry challenges domestically.

In 2007, we founded Sarathy Geotech & Engineering Services Pvt Ltd., a pioneering geotechnical firm augmented by geological and geophysical services. From its inception, my vision for the company was to create an enterprise grounded in robust values committed to delivering premier solutions, adding value to our clients, and adhering to best practices. Our goal was to bridge the industry gap by providing high-caliber, locally-based geotechnical consulting

I empower my team to make autonomous decisions and ensure they receive genuine, commendatory, and constructive feedback. This approach inspires and motivates them, driving excellence in complex engineering projects.

services. Today, I am proud to say that Sarathy Geotech & Engineering Services Pvt Ltd. stands as one of the nation's most preeminent geotechnical service providers.

How have technological advancements influenced geotechnical engineering?

Technological advancements have significantly revolutionized geotechnical engineering practices, both offshore and onshore. Innovations in instrumentation, sensor technology, and software applications, bolstered by internet connectivity, have supplanted many rudimentary methods. Accessing real-time information from the comfort of one's office or home has become a standard convenience.

These technological strides have not only elevated the quality and accuracy of data but have also significantly enhanced efficiency, leading to considerable cost savings and promoting sustainability. As a result, contemporary geotechnical engineering practices are more precise, economical, and environmentally conscientious, highlighting the significant impact of technology on the field.

As the Chairman and Managing Director, what is your leadership style, and how do you inspire your team to achieve excellence?

As the Chairman and Managing Director, my leadership style is centered on disseminating knowledge and fostering employee



confidence through effective mentoring. I empower my team to make autonomous decisions and ensure they receive genuine, commendatory, and constructive feedback. This approach inspires and motivates them, driving excellence in complex engineering projects.

With your recent expansion into the Middle East, what opportunities do you see for Sarathy Geotech on the global stage?

Our recent expansion into Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia has unlocked new markets in the Middle East, presenting numerous opportunities aligned with the ambitious growth plans of both countries. Establishing a local presence allows us to actively engage in projects as specialists to address complex geotechnical challenges. We are witnessing the emergence of numerous mega and giga projects alongside the burgeoning oil, gas, and renewable energy sectors anticipated to flourish in the coming decades. The Middle Eastern region presents a wealth of opportunities where we can make significant contributions.

Looking ahead, we aim to leverage our expertise and success in the Middle East to penetrate other global markets, further solidifying Sarathy Geotech as a leader in geotechnical engineering on the world stage.

Having been in the industry for decades, I have observed significant evolutions in geotechnical engineering, transforming the field from traditional practices to highly sophisticated techniques. Technological

innovations, such as advanced geophysical methods, real-time monitoring systems, and computer modeling, have greatly enhanced our capacity to analyze and resolve intricate geotechnical issues. Looking forward, I anticipate continued technological advancements playing a pivotal role in our field. Integrating AI and machine learning will become increasingly prevalent, leading to more intelligent, more resilient infrastructure solutions. Moreover, the growing emphasis on sustainability will drive the development of new materials and methods that minimize environmental impact.

What advice would you give aspiring geotechnical engineers just starting their careers?

My advice to aspiring geotechnical engineers embarking on their careers is to cultivate a robust foundation in the core principles of geotechnical engineering while maintaining a sense of curiosity and openness to continuous learning. The field is perpetually evolving with new technologies and methodologies, making it crucial to stay abreast of the latest advancements and pursue ongoing education throughout your professional journey.

Hands-on experience is indispensable. Engage in fieldwork, internships, and practical projects as much as possible to gain invaluable real-world insights. Developing strong problem-solving skills and the ability to think critically will distinguish you in addressing complex geotechnical challenges.

Lastly, approach your work with integrity and a commitment to excellence.

NAVIGATING TURBULENCE: HOW GOH CHOON PHONG STEERED SINGAPORE AIRLINES

Written by Brianna Da Cruz



Goh Choon Phong has been the driving force behind Singapore Airlines (SIA) as its Chief Executive Officer since January 1, 2011. Goh also sits on the boards of SIA Engineering Company and Mastercard, chairs Budget Aviation Holdings, and is actively involved with the National University of Singapore and MIT. Recognized for his industry impact, he has received multiple awards, including the Asia-Pacific Airline CEO of the Year and the Eisenhower Global Innovation Award.

A graduate of Hwa Chong Junior College, Goh's academic brilliance led him to the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). There, he earned both a bachelor's and master's degree in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, laying the foundation for a career that would seamlessly blend technological innovation with business acumen.

"My time at MIT shaped my approach to problem-solving and innovation," Goh reflects. "It taught me to think critically and approach challenges from multiple angles – skills that have been invaluable throughout my career in aviation."

Rising Through the Ranks

Goh's journey with Singapore Airlines began immediately after his studies when he joined as a cadet administrative officer under sponsorship from the airline. This early investment in Goh's potential would pay dividends for decades. Over the next

20 years, he steadily climbed the corporate ladder, taking on roles that spanned the breadth of the airline's operations.

His diverse experiences included stints as Senior Vice President of Commercial Technology, Senior Vice President of Information Technology, and Executive Vice President of Marketing. Goh also served as Chairman of SilkAir, a former SIA subsidiary, broadening his perspective on managing different market segments within the aviation industry.

When Goh assumed the role of CEO in 2011, he brought with him a vision for SIA that would propel the airline to new heights. His tenure has marked strategic decisions, innovative thinking, and a relentless pursuit of excellence.

Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic

Perhaps the most significant test of Goh's leadership came with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The global

"Our goal is to create a seamless, personalized experience for our customers at every touchpoint," Goh explains. "This means using technology not just to improve our operations, but to truly understand and anticipate our customers' needs."

aviation industry was brought to its knees, and SIA, with no domestic market to fall back on, faced an existential crisis.

"When the pandemic hit, we were operating at just 3% of our pre-COVID capacity," Goh recalls. "We were burning through 300 to 400 million Singapore dollars every month. It was a fight for survival, but also an opportunity to reimagine our future."

Under Goh's guidance, SIA took swift and decisive action. The airline raised an impressive S\$22.4 billion in fresh liquidity, allowing it to retain its core capabilities and prepare for the post-pandemic recovery. This strategy paid off handsomely, with SIA reporting a record annual profit of S\$2.68 billion in fiscal year 2023-2024.

"We had faith that travel demand would return," Goh explains. "Our strategy was to be first off the blocks when borders reopened. This meant retaining our talented staff and keeping our fleet ready, decisions that paid off when demand surged back."

Strategic Consolidation and Expansion

Goh's tenure has been characterized by bold moves to streamline operations and expand SIA's global footprint. He oversaw the merger of SIA's budget carriers, Tigerair and Scoot, creating a stronger low-cost offering under the Scoot brand. Additionally, he led the integration of SilkAir into the main Singapore Airlines brand, optimizing the group's resources and market presence.

Perhaps most notably, Goh spearheaded SIA's venture into the Indian market through a joint venture with Tata Group, forming Vistara. This strategic move culminated in the merger of Vistara with Air India, securing SIA a 25.1% stake in one of the world's fastest-growing aviation markets.

"India is a huge market with immense potential," Goh notes. "It's already the third-largest travel market globally and is expected to double in size in the next decade. Our stake in Air India positions us perfectly to tap into this growth engine."

Embracing Digital Transformation

Recognizing the critical role of technology in shaping the future of aviation, Goh has been a driving force behind SIA's digital initiatives. "In today's world, being a great airline means being a great digital company too," he asserts.

Under his leadership, SIA has invested heavily in technology, from enhancing customer experiences through innovative apps to leveraging data analytics for operational efficiency. The airline has also explored cutting-edge technologies like

blockchain for loyalty programs and artificial intelligence for predictive maintenance.

"Our goal is to create a seamless, personalized experience for our customers at every touchpoint," Goh explains. "This means using technology not just to improve our operations, but to truly understand and anticipate our customers' needs."

Looking to the Future

As Goh continues to lead Singapore Airlines into the future, he remains focused on positioning the airline for long-term success in an ever-changing industry. Sustainability is a growing priority, with SIA committing to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

"The aviation industry faces significant challenges, from environmental concerns to geopolitical uncertainties," Goh acknowledges. "But with challenges come opportunities. We're investing in sustainable aviation fuels, exploring new technologies, and constantly looking for ways to reduce our environmental footprint while enhancing the travel experience for our customers."

Reflecting on his journey and the future of Singapore Airlines, Goh concludes with a philosophy that encapsulates his leadership style: "In this industry, you can never stand still. The key to success is always to look ahead, anticipate changes, and be ready to adapt. But most importantly, it's about the people. The resilience, dedication, and innovative spirit of our team at Singapore Airlines – that's what truly sets us apart and will continue to drive our success in the years to come."



INNOVATION MEETS SUSTAINABILITY: HAMUDI NAJAMI'S APPROACH TO MODERN INDUSTRIAL CONSTRUCTION

Written by Elena Arnaiz



Hamudi Najami, the dynamic Vice President and COO of Sami Najami Engineering & Projects Ltd. has been pivotal in Israel's industrial construction landscape for over a decade. A Technion graduate with a knack for blending deep technical know-how with an inspiring vision, Najami is leading his company toward new heights in innovation and sustainability.

My advice to leaders is to recognize the crucial role employees play as company representatives. Treat them with respect and focus on their development. Investing in their growth and providing job security fosters a positive environment that drives the company's success.

In this candid interview, Najami opens up about his journey from a young graduate eager to make a difference to a key leader reshaping the industry. From the impact of advanced 3D modeling to the benefits of modular construction, Najami provides a personal look at how technology and sustainability can go hand in hand.

Can you share your path to becoming COO at Sami Najami Group?

My journey with Sami Najami Engineering & Projects has been a deeply rewarding experience. At 20, fresh out of Technion, I jumped into our family business with

a clear goal: to reshape the construction industry by blending advanced technology with sustainable practices. Partnering with my brother Ahmad, now our CEO, I've had the privilege of helping steer the company's growth over the last 14 years.

From the beginning, my focus was on more than just following industry trends. I wanted to redefine what was possible in industrial construction. As I learned the ins and outs of project management and client relations, I began to see the bigger picture—our work isn't just about constructing buildings; it's about building communities and creating environments that nurture growth and innovation. This realization was a turning point for me.

not just erecting structures but also laying the foundations for a better future.

How have technological advancements changed the engineering and project management landscape?

The construction industry has seen rapid advancements, and at Sami Najami Engineering & Projects, we have prioritized staying at the cutting edge. Our focus on integrating innovative technology allows us to streamline operations and enhance project outcomes for our clients.

A central component of our approach is using advanced 3D modeling at the outset of every project. This goes beyond simple visual representations—our dedicated team of specialists creates fully immersive digital prototypes. By thoroughly examining each project in this virtual environment, we identify potential issues before they arise on-site. This proactive method not only saves time and reduces costs but also ensures smoother execution and minimizes environmental disruptions.

We have also embraced Off-Site Manufacturing (OSM) and modular construction techniques. These methods allow us to prefabricate significant portions of the work in controlled factory environments, improving efficiency and quality while reducing on-site noise, air pollution, and soil disruption. The benefits extend beyond faster project completion and cost savings, with a notable reduction in our environmental footprint.

In addition, we have invested heavily in 3D seismic and static planning tools, which enable us to transform even the most challenging spaces. Whether converting existing structures into functional fabrication areas or creating complex facilities with SubFab and clean rooms, we use cutting-edge technology to push the boundaries of what's possible.

By integrating these innovative methods, we're not only delivering faster, more cost-effective projects but also setting new benchmarks for sustainability, adaptability, and high-quality standards in the construction industry.

Looking ahead, what are your plans for Sami Najami Engineering & Projects?

Our goal is clear: to expand our global operations while continuing to champion

sustainability in industrial construction. The demand for eco-friendly building practices and energy-efficient solutions proliferates, and we see this as an opportunity to lead. We're not just focused on building structures—we're focused on building a sustainable and equitable future where innovation aligns with environmental responsibility.

In recent years, we've taken significant strides by incorporating industrial waste recycling and solar energy into our projects. Centralizing much of the construction process in factory settings allows us to manage waste efficiently and reduce environmental impact, protecting local ecosystems. Modular construction, which we consider the future of building, plays a crucial role in this. It's efficient, sustainable, and maintains high quality while reducing noise, air pollution, and environmental disruption.

As we look to expand internationally, we are committed to adapting these practices to diverse markets. Our experience managing complex projects in Israel and Europe prepares us to bring our innovative approaches to new regions while maintaining the balance between speed, efficiency, and sustainability. By continuing to build structures that benefit both people and the planet, we are confident that we can set a global benchmark for sustainable construction.

What advice would you give young engineers starting their careers and aspiring to leadership positions?

My advice to leaders is to recognize the crucial role employees play as company representatives. Treat them with respect and focus on their development. Investing in their growth and providing job security fosters a positive environment that drives the company's success.

Stay curious and open to new ideas. Adaptability and innovation are key in an industry that is in a constant state of flux. I personally find inspiration in books by Dale Carnegie, Richard Koch, and Robert Kiyosaki, whose insights continue to influence my thinking.

Finally, leadership isn't just about managing projects—it's about inspiring people and creating a vision they believe in. While our industry is built on steel, it's the people—our teams, clients, and communities—who truly drive us forward.

THE ACCIDENTAL ENTREPRENEUR: N. JAYAKUMAR'S UNCONVENTIONAL PATH TO FINANCIAL LEADERSHIP

Written by Sherlyn Gomes



N. Jayakumar is a seasoned veteran of the Indian financial services industry with over three decades of experience. As Managing Director and Group CEO of Prime Securities since 1992, Jayakumar's journey began at Citibank, where he led the Corporate Finance division. He holds a PGDM in Finance from the prestigious Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad and a Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi.

In this candid interview, Jayakumar reflects on his unexpected journey into entrepreneurship and Prime Securities' evolution under his leadership. He delves into the company's transition from capital-heavy activities to a model focused on intellectual capital and networks, redefining traditional success metrics.

What are your most significant challenges and achievements while leading Prime Securities?

I never set out to be an entrepreneur. I joined Prime Securities as an employee leading the Corporate Finance team, not building a company. But in 1993, when the original team unexpectedly left, I chose to stay and shape Prime's future, even though entrepreneurship wasn't my plan.

Over time, we evolved from capital-heavy activities like proprietary trading to a capital-light model, focusing on intellectual capital and networks. We redefined ROI as 'Return on Intellectual Property' and RONW as 'Return on Network,' emphasizing relationships and expertise over financial capital.

Despite challenges like the collapse of financial giants, we've not only survived but thrived, becoming a trusted name in corporate finance. However, the most rewarding part of this journey has been witnessing the incredible talent that has passed through Prime—individuals who

have led and excelled in the financial world. Our alumni network reads like a who's who of the financial world—leaders like Rashesh Shah, who heads Edelweiss; Vineet Bhatnagar of Philip Capital; Ashish Kacholia, the ace investor, and Ruchir Sharma, to name just a few. Seeing them succeed is a source of immense pride, as Prime has been a nursery for talent, helping shape the leaders of tomorrow.

As the MD and Group CEO, what is your leadership philosophy?

The answer to this is simple: making yourself dispensable is crucial to building true organizational strength. Empowering others and creating more dealmakers and relationship-builders within the organization fosters an environment where the company can thrive independently of any individual. This isn't just a choice; it's a necessity for sustainable growth.

At Prime, we've cultivated an atmosphere where even those who have left often return, which speaks volumes about

the culture we've built. This isn't a one-man show or a 'Lala company'—it's a publicly traded company with a market cap close to ₹950 crores. Remarkably, nearly 20% of that market cap is represented by cash and cash equivalents on our balance sheet, a level of financial security that even companies much larger than ours often lack.

This financial stability isn't just for show; it's the foundation that allows us to hire top talent, empower people, and foster a culture where learning from mistakes is encouraged.

How do you balance the need for innovation with inherent risk in the financial industry, particularly in early-stage financing and restructuring services?

As part of our core philosophy, we believe this is a unique moment in post-independence India, where capital is readily available for those willing to take risks and build enterprises. Supporting young entrepreneurs in realizing their dreams isn't just good business—it's also good karma.

Out of the 100 companies we evaluate, we might select only ten that demonstrate the qualities necessary for success—such as the ability to absorb capital, maintain accountability, establish a strong board, and manage measured risks. To further align ourselves with the entrepreneurs we back, we often take our fees as equity, ensuring that we're as invested in their success as they are.

We understand that there's no one-size-fits-all formula for success. Each venture requires a bespoke approach, and we continually refine our strategies to stay sharp and responsive. It is the unique needs of the company we support.

How do you foresee the evolution of the investment banking industry in the next ten years?

Global changes have heavily influenced the evolution of the Indian investment banking space. Moving ahead, investment bankers will need to move away from cookie-cutter solutions and instead focus on crafting bespoke strategies tailored to each client's specific needs.

A key characteristic of successful investment banks is the belief that every problem is solvable. You have to approach challenges with the mindset that solutions are possible; only then can you truly address

Out of the 100 companies we evaluate, we might select only ten that demonstrate the qualities necessary for success—such as the ability to absorb capital, maintain accountability, establish a strong board, and manage measured risks.

the issues at hand. In many ways, this mirrors life—there are no standard solutions to life's challenges. Within the regulatory framework, the real skill lies in navigating complex issues while balancing shareholder interests and the greater good.

The future of investment banking will rely on a combination of the next generation's exuberance and the experience of seasoned professionals. This synergy will be crucial in building and sustaining successful organizations.

What advice would you give young professionals aspiring to leadership positions in finance and investment banking?

As in any field, specialization is key. Surface-level knowledge is no longer enough; specialists are highly sought after and command higher compensation. To stand out, you must delve deeply into your chosen field and become an expert, which will increase your value in the marketplace.

In addition, strong leadership skills, including respect for colleagues and a deep understanding of your field, are required—qualities often overlooked, especially in the competitive financial services industry. I advise joining organizations that offer diverse experiences and help you define your goals. This approach will set you on a path to success.

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SHAPING THE FUTURE OF ASIAN REAL ESTATE: INSIGHTS FROM RUSMIN LAWIN

Written by Justin Roberts

Rusmin Lawin, a distinguished global entrepreneur and real estate leader with over 25 years of industry experience, serves as the President of FIABCI Asia Pacific and a board member of FIABCI International. In these roles, Mr. Lawin plays a pivotal part in shaping regional real estate policies and practices.

In this exclusive interview, we explore Mr. Lawin's remarkable career trajectory from his early mentorship under the esteemed Dr. Ciputra and his current involvement in developing Indonesia's new capital, Nusantara.

constituent in global urban development dialogues.

As FIABCI's representative to the U.N. in Vienna (2020-2021) and Geneva (2021-2022), I strengthened ties between Asia, the Pacific, and the U.S., focusing on leveraging

has culminated in my current role as a board member and President of the Asian Pacific region, a position I will hold until 2026.

Could you share some pivotal moments in your career that have defined your journey in real estate?

As a distinguished envoy for the International Real Estate Federation (FIABCI), I've been privileged to represent our organization at the United Nations' prestigious venues in New York, Vienna, and Geneva. This pivotal role has allowed me to forge crucial partnerships with UN-Habitat and ECOSOC, establishing FIABCI as a key

What early experiences or mentors helped ignite your passion for the real estate industry?

I began my real estate journey a quarter-century ago, rising from regional to national and now international prominence, inspired by the late Dr. Ciputra, a visionary mentor who recognized my potential.

As President of Real Estate Indonesia's Northern Sumatra chapter, I was lucky to meet the late Dr. Ciputra, the Legend of Indonesia real estate. His guidance led me to greater involvement in FIABCI, the world's leading real estate federation, founded in the aftermath of World War II and formalized in Paris in 1951.

Dr. Ciputra, the architect of Real Estate Indonesia's integration into FIABCI, discerned in me a unique talent for forging international connections. This foresight

In tandem with promoting sustainability, I champion real estate as a cornerstone of prudent investment strategies.

the potential of Asian diaspora communities on the U.S. West Coast.

In a serendipitous turn of events amid the global pandemic, I was handpicked by Indonesia's Minister of National Development Planning to spearhead a high-level delegation. Our mission was to engage with investors across Dubai, Abu Dhabi, the USA, and Europe, gathering insights to shape the structure and investment framework for Indonesia's ambitious new capital, Nusantara.

This endeavor built upon my earlier involvement with the project's nascent stages in 2018-2022, where I represented the Real Estate Indonesia Association in supporting the Ministry's visionary plans. My contributions to this monumental undertaking were recognized with the prestigious Burj CEO Award in Dubai.

Furthermore, I journeyed across 34 countries during the height of the pandemic (2021-2022), promoting investment opportunities in Nusantara. This herculean effort earned me a place in the Indonesia World Records Museum.

As FIABCI's U.N. representative in Geneva, how do you plan to influence global real estate policies and drive change?

My role encompasses absorbing and disseminating information on sustainable and environmentally conscious practices. Drawing inspiration from models such as the United Nations initiatives in Geneva, I strive to propagate the ethos of green development throughout Asia.

The UNECE Committee on Urban Development, Housing, and Land Management is our primary partner in tackling global challenges within the housing sector. Together, we are addressing critical issues such as sustainability and green housing, affordable housing solutions, access to clean water, and managing urban sprawl, among others.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE),



The Burj CEO Award 2022 Dubai

established by ECOSOC in 1947, is one of the five regional commissions of the United Nations. Its primary mission is to promote pan-European economic integration. While UNECE is predominantly focused on Europe, there are significant opportunities to explore collaboration in Asia, particularly through pilot projects, funding initiatives, and the exchange of expertise and technology.

The pervasive influence of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles has moved beyond a mere trend and evolved into an integral aspect of contemporary lifestyles. My mission involves inculcating these values into Asian society.

In tandem with promoting sustainability, I champion real estate as a cornerstone of prudent investment strategies. Real estate remains one of the most resilient and time-tested portfolios, rivaling even precious metals in its stability. I ardently advocate for property ownership as a crucial stepping stone for socioeconomic advancement, particularly for those aspiring to rise from lower to middle-income brackets.

Contrary to the notion popularized by certain tech moguls that home ownership is superfluous, I believe real estate assets play a pivotal role in facilitating upward mobility.

What are the most significant trends and challenges in Asia's real estate and infrastructure sectors?

In my work across Asia, I've seen infrastructure and real estate as inseparable partners in urban development. It's a simple truth: where good roads, utilities, and public services go, homes and businesses soon follow.

My primary focus has been on Southeast Asia, a region of ten diverse countries, including Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Vietnam, the

Philippines, and Myanmar, brimming with potential.

The challenge lies not merely in physical construction but in crafting viable financial models. We draw inspiration from established markets such as the United States and the United Kingdom, adapting their public-private partnership frameworks to suit our unique context.

I propose evolving this model to include a fourth critical element: the populace. This "Four P" approach—Public, Private, Partnership, and People—places citizens at the core of urban planning and ensures that developments are not only economically viable but also socially beneficial.

The ultimate measure of a development's success is its positive impact on the community it serves.

As a global entrepreneur, how do you stay informed about diverse global real estate markets and regulations?

While overseeing real estate development across Asia, I've identified a critical need for regulatory harmonization, particularly within the ASEAN framework. This initiative aims to establish a unified code of real estate practices, emulating the European Union's successful model.

The proximity of ASEAN nations provides an ideal testing ground for this endeavor. By standardizing regulations, we can foster a more transparent and predictable investment climate, which is crucial for attracting both domestic and international capital.

Our approach would be methodical, beginning with ASEAN member states before considering broader implementation. The goal is to create a robust system that protects investors while promoting regional economic growth.

REIMAGINING PLASTICS: SUDHAKAR PALLATH'S JOURNEY TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

Written by Brianna Da Cruz



Sudhakar Pallath is the Managing Director of Modern Plastic Industries, a prominent company based in South Goa, India. With nearly two decades at the helm, Pallath has steered Modern Plastic Industries to become a leading manufacturer of high-quality molded components.

Through this inspiring profile feature, we gain a comprehensive understanding of Sudhakar's entrepreneurial vision, the company's core values, and its strategic approach to maintaining its position as a leader in the plastic molding industry.

expertise I had gained felt like an untapped resource, ready to be used in a new, exciting way.

With a clear vision and determination, I decided to embark on a new journey. I wanted to harness my passion and industry insights to build a venture that truly reflected my values and aspirations.

our commitment to quality and customer satisfaction quickly earned us a positive reputation among our clients. Encouraged by this early success, we steadily built our business step by step.

A major milestone came in 2008 when we received the prestigious ISO quality certification from an esteemed international body. This significant achievement instilled trust and confidence in our customers and fueled our determination to expand further.

Today, Modern Plastic Industries is one of the leading manufacturers of high-quality molded components, offering comprehensive design and supply services. Our state-of-the-art facility in Bethora-Goa meets the growing demand for quality molded components, leveraging our expertise and advanced capabilities.

Esteemed institutions have consistently recognized our dedication to excellence

With a clear vision and determination, I decided to embark on a new journey. I wanted to harness my passion and industry insights to build a venture that truly reflected my values and aspirations.

and compliance with legal and regulatory standards. The GST Council has praised our prompt tax payments, return filings, and strict adherence to legal requirements. From 2014 to 2023, we received three commendations from the central government for our efficient paperwork and timely payment of GST and CST obligations.

Your company prides itself on a customer-focused approach, achieving a 98% on-time delivery rate. What practices or strategies do you implement to maintain such high customer service standards?

Our dedicated dispatch department is at the heart of our operations, a central unit that carefully monitors and manages every aspect

of our deliveries. With a sharp eye for detail and a steadfast commitment to timeliness, this team is the crucial link between our production facilities and valued customers.

To minimize delays and ensure smooth logistics, we have invested in our fleet services, giving us complete control over the transportation process. This strategic move allows us to tackle challenges head-on, ensuring our shipments reach their destinations without unnecessary delays.

Additionally, we hold daily standing meetings, where our dispatch team gathers to discuss pending deliveries, address potential bottlenecks, and devise efficient solutions. This proactive approach fosters open communication, helping us avoid issues and guaranteeing timely dispatches.

What steps has Modern Plastic taken to promote sustainability and reduce its environmental footprint?

Driven by a deep commitment to environmental stewardship, we have developed a comprehensive strategy to minimize our ecological footprint. At the core of our operations are state-of-the-art, energy-efficient machines that optimize our production processes while significantly reducing energy consumption.

Our dedication to minimizing waste has produced impressive results, with our scrap percentage consistently around 0.05%, far below the industry standard of 2%. We have also instituted a rigorous daily monitoring system to track our power consumption and scrap generation. This vigilant oversight allows us to identify improvement areas and swiftly implement strategies to reduce our environmental impact.

Additionally, we are actively exploring renewable energy sources. Plans are

underway to install solar panels on our rooftops, enabling us to move towards a more sustainable and eco-friendly energy mix.

Through these initiatives, we aim to reduce our carbon footprint while setting a benchmark for responsible manufacturing practices in our industry.

With India's increasing potential to become a global manufacturing powerhouse, how is Modern Plastic positioning itself to take advantage of these opportunities?

With a strategic focus on global markets, we are intensifying our efforts to expand our export operations. Currently, 5% of our sales come from international markets, reflecting our commitment to establishing a strong global presence. We have carefully crafted a roadmap to increase this percentage, leveraging our expertise and quality offerings to meet the discerning needs of customers worldwide.

In addition, we are investing significantly in the future of our company, with a substantial USD 1.2 million allocation dedicated to enhancing and expanding our facilities. This ambitious initiative will not only boost our production capabilities but also align with our sustainability goals. We plan to install rooftop solar panels to reduce our reliance on conventional energy sources and minimize our environmental impact.

Plastic, an indispensable material in electronics and countless other industries holds immense potential for growth in India. Compared to Europe, our nation's per capita plastic consumption remains significantly lower, indicating a vast untapped market as India continues its rapid development. I firmly believe that the demand for plastic products will keep growing, driven by the evolving needs of a modernizing society.



EMBRACING THE WINDS OF CHANGE: A NEW LEADER'S IMPERATIVE

Written by contributing writer **Karen Carey**



About the Author:

Possessing a wealth of leadership experience, **Karen Carey** is not just a coach but a seasoned curator of stories for hundreds of leaders. She is a Human Resources Consultant and Executive Coach. Her approach is not to just offer guidance; rather orchestrate a symphony of memorable leadership experiences. She is the founder and proprietor of Global Advisory Associates Ltd. pioneering its growth and success through entrepreneurial leadership.

Change is the only constant in life, and nowhere is this truer than in the dynamic realm of leadership. In the fast-paced world we navigate today, the ability to adapt is not just a skill; it's a necessity. As a new leader stepping into uncharted territories, your capability to embrace change can be the key to unlocking unparalleled success. Let's explore this imperative for leaders, backed by examples and wisdom from those who have thrived through change.

The ever-changing landscape

The business landscape is in a perpetual state of flux, driven by technological advancements, global events, and evolving consumer expectations. As a new leader, understanding this fluidity is crucial. Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella once remarked, "Don't be a know-it-all; be a learn-it-all." This mindset shift is fundamental in adapting to change. The most successful leaders are those who acknowledge the ever-changing landscape and approach it with a curious and learning mindset. The assertion that the business landscape is in a perpetual state of flux, shaped by technological advancements, global events, and evolving consumer expectations, is undeniably accurate.

One compelling argument for the dynamic nature of the business landscape comes from the rapid pace of technological advancements. For instance, consider the advent of artificial intelligence and machine learning, which has revolutionised industries ranging from healthcare to finance. Leaders who remain stagnant in their knowledge risk becoming obsolete in the face of such transformative technologies. The ability to adapt and acquire new skills becomes a competitive advantage.

Numerous studies support the idea that organisations with a culture of continuous learning tend to outperform their peers. According to a report by McKinsey, companies that invest in employee learning and development are 1.4 times more likely to have engaged employees and are 1.9 times more likely to be top-quartile financial performers. This highlights the tangible benefits of fostering a learning-oriented culture within an organisation.

Additionally, real-world stories of successful leaders exemplify the importance of embracing change and adopting a learning mindset. Take the example of Netflix, a company that transitioned from a DVD rental service to a global streaming giant. Reed Hastings, co-founder and CEO, recognised the shifting landscape of

media consumption and led his team to adapt proactively. By learning from market dynamics and consumer preferences, Netflix transformed an industry and became a case study in successful adaptation to change.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a stark reminder of the unpredictable nature of global events that can significantly impact businesses. Leaders who navigated their organisations successfully through the pandemic were those who demonstrated agility, resilience, and a commitment to continuous learning. The ability to absorb new information, reassess strategies, and pivot when necessary was crucial for survival and success.

The fluidity of the business landscape necessitates a fundamental mindset shift for new leaders. Satya Nadella's wise counsel emphasises the importance of being a "learn-it-all" rather than a "know-it-all." This perspective is reinforced by empirical evidence from studies, as well as the stories of successful leaders and the impact of global events. Embracing change with a curious and learning-oriented mindset is not just a strategy; it is a prerequisite for leadership success in today's dynamic world.

Embracing the uncomfortable

Change often comes with discomfort, and it is the leaders who can navigate through this discomfort that emerge victorious. Sara Blakely, the founder of Spanx, famously said, "Embrace what you don't know, especially in the beginning, because what you don't know can become your greatest asset." New leaders must be willing to step outside their comfort zones, take calculated risks, and view the unknown as an opportunity for growth.

Learning from failure

Failure is an inevitable part of the journey towards success. It's not about avoiding failure but rather about learning from it. Elon Musk, the visionary behind SpaceX and Tesla, once stated, "Failure is an option here. If things are not failing, you are not innovating enough." New leaders should view failure as a stepping stone towards innovation and improvement. It's not the fall that defines a leader but the ability to rise stronger after each setback.

Cultivating a culture of adaptability

Leadership is not a solitary journey; it's about steering a collective effort. To foster adaptability, a leader must instil a



culture that values change. Google's parent company, Alphabet, embraces a culture of innovation where employees are encouraged to take risks and pursue ambitious projects. A new leader can inspire their team by creating an environment that values agility, experimentation, and continuous learning.

Tech in leadership

Technology is a significant driver of change, and leaders need to be tech-savvy to steer their organisations successfully. As Bill Gates puts it, "We always overestimate the change that will occur in the next two years and underestimate the change that will occur in the next ten. Don't let yourself be lulled into inaction." Leaders should invest time in understanding emerging technologies and leverage them to stay ahead in the game.

The power of adaptability

Adaptability is a skill that propels leaders ahead of the game. It involves having ready access to different ways of thinking, enabling

leaders to shift flexibly and apply knowledge across diverse situations. This skill not only facilitates faster learning but also opens the doors to opportunities as well as personal and professional growth. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a mindfulness meditation teacher, encapsulates this idea beautifully with his quote, "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf."

The challenge of transition

Leaders often grapple with the challenge of leading their teams through transitions. Be it changes in the workplace, shifts in educational paradigms, or transformations in relationships, the ability to navigate these transitions is crucial. It's about more than just managing change; it's about leading others through the waves of uncertainty.

The outdated paradigm

Traditional change management, as per research published by McKinsey in a report titled "Changing Change Management," is becoming increasingly outdated.

Shockingly, the report suggests that 70% of change programs fail to achieve their goals, mainly due to employee resistance and a lack of management support. This highlights the necessity for leaders to evolve beyond conventional change management approaches and embrace a more agile and adaptive mindset.

Cultivating the agile mindset

To enhance their adaptability, leaders need to focus on continually developing their agility quotient. This involves cultivating a mindset that prioritises building deeper human connections, continuous learning, and the ability to unlearn behaviours, beliefs, and values. It's about capitalising on new opportunities by staying open to different perspectives and embracing change as a constant force for progress.

As Nelson Mandela wisely said, "I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it." Embrace change, and let it be the catalyst for your triumph as a new leader.

SERVICE AT HEART: SUPHAJEE SUTHUMPUN'S CUSTOMER-CENTRIC APPROACH

Written by Justin Roberts



Suphaje Suthumpun is the visionary Group CEO of Dusit International, Thailand's renowned hospitality giant. Taking the helm in 2016 with no prior industry experience, she has driven the company to unprecedented financial success and global expansion, now overseeing over 300 hotels and resorts across 14 countries. Suphaje's innovative approach integrates sustainability with the essence of Thai hospitality, doubling the company's hotel portfolio and diversifying its business ventures.

Suphaje Suthumpun's career began not in the lobby of a luxury hotel but in the innovative corridors of the tech industry. With an impressive background that includes executive roles at IBM and Thaicom Public Co Ltd., Suthumpun made a surprising leap into the hospitality sector in January 2016 when she took the helm as CEO of Dusit International.

"My background is actually in technology," Suthumpun reflects. "I

first entered the hospitality industry as Dusit's CEO in 2016." This transition, while unexpected, was underpinned by a philosophy that would prove invaluable in her new role.

Finding Her Passion in Customer Service

Though technology and hospitality may seem like distinct fields, Suthumpun found

a unifying element that sparked her passion: customer service. She explains, "At the heart of any business is the goal of serving customers. Whether you're in hospitality or technology, your focus should always be on delivering the best possible experience to those who choose your product."

This customer-centric philosophy has been the driving force behind Suthumpun's success across industries. She recalls her early days at IBM, saying, "When I first

"We've been strengthening our foundations, consolidating our operations, and diversifying our portfolio across different geographies and business models to position ourselves for sustainable and profitable growth."

joined IBM in 1989, the company was going through a bit of a rough patch. But we spent a decade carefully re-calibrating the company, changing the culture, and shifting the business model from a hardware focus to a service focus. Business boomed as a result."

Rising Through the Ranks

Suthumpun's career trajectory is marked by her ability to transform businesses by shifting focus from products to services. This skill proved invaluable as she took the helm at Dusit International, where she embraced the company's longstanding traditions while ushering in a new era of change.

Under her leadership, Dusit International has embarked on a three-pronged strategy for balance, expansion, and diversification. Suthumpun elaborates, "We've been strengthening our foundations, consolidating our operations, and diversifying our portfolio across different geographies and business models to position ourselves for sustainable and profitable growth."

This strategy includes balancing their portfolio so that half of their operations are outside of Thailand, doubling the number of rooms in operation, and diversifying their business lines so that approximately ten percent of total revenue will come from new investments in hospitality-related industries.

Expanding the Dusit Portfolio

One of Suthumpun's significant achievements has been expanding Dusit's

portfolio across the lodging spectrum. Under her leadership, the company has entered the high-end vacation rental market by acquiring Elite Havens, a leading provider of luxury villas in Asia.

Additionally, Dusit International is set to launch a new lifestyle brand, ASAI Hotels, targeting millennial-minded travelers. "In early 2020, our offerings will expand even further with the opening of our first ASAI Hotel in Bangkok, Thailand," Suthumpun shares. "We already have six more properties in the pipeline across Thailand, Myanmar, and the Philippines."

Recognizing the importance of sustainable practices, Suthumpun has led Dusit International to meet and exceed stringent ISO certification standards. She emphasizes, "We must be conscious of our environmental impact and do everything we can to save energy and water and limit waste."

Alongside sustainability, Suthumpun has cultivated a culture of innovation within Dusit International. She proudly states, "We've fostered and promoted a culture of innovation at our properties to ensure management can take the initiative to delight guests with offerings that are unique to each."

This innovation is evident in new concepts like Namak by Kunal Kapur at Dusit Thani Abu Dhabi and the street-food dining concept, 24th Street, at Dusit Thani Dubai. These unique offerings have garnered acclaim and set Dusit properties apart in competitive markets.

Under Suthumpun's leadership, Dusit International has seen remarkable expansion, now boasting 269 properties (nine owned and 260 managed) across six brands in 13 countries. Looking ahead, the company plans to continue its growth by opening 10 to 12 hotels annually in key destinations starting in 2019.

Navigating Challenges and Embracing Change

Suthumpun's tenure has not been without challenges. The redevelopment of Dusit's flagship hotel, Dusit Thani Bangkok, as part of a landmark mixed-use project, has required careful planning and execution. "As a company, we're constantly seeking ways to enhance revenue creation so we can maintain and enhance our property portfolio while delivering value to shareholders – especially while our flagship hotel is redeveloped," she explains.

Moreover, Suthumpun has had to navigate the rapidly changing hospitality

industry landscape. She notes, "There has been rapid digital transformation across all touchpoints – customer journey, marketing, reputation, amongst others – and the push towards sustainability also continues apace, with many guests and companies now only choosing to do business with hotels with green credentials."

A Vision for the Future

Looking ahead, Suthumpun remains committed to Dusit International's global mission of delivering gracious Thai hospitality while adapting to changing market demands. She believes in the power of creating bespoke experiences and leveraging technology to enhance guest satisfaction.

"To compete and succeed in this business environment, we must create bespoke experiences through value-driven offerings that provide the utmost convenience for our guests and customers," Suthumpun says.

Her vision extends beyond just running hotels. Suthumpun is also passionate about hospitality education, seeing it as a way to strengthen the quality of the industry as a whole.





BALANCING BRANDS: TINA GHAFURIAN'S MULTI-FACETED LEADERSHIP AT OMORFIA

Written by Sherlyn Gomes

Tina Ghafurian, COO of Omorfia Group, has played a vital role in transforming the beauty industry with brands like Tips & Toes, Bedashing, and Juice brand. With over two decades in the industry, she has progressed to become a leading figure, driven by her business insight and passion for innovation.

In this candid interview, Ghafurian shares her unexpected journey into the beauty world, the challenges of expanding across the UAE and Saudi Arabia, and the balance between brand consistency and innovation. She also reveals the lessons that have shaped her unique business approach and career.

Can you tell us when you realized your passion for business and leadership? What inspired you to pursue this path?

From a young age, I naturally gravitated toward leadership roles and enjoyed guiding and supporting my peers. My passion for business emerged during my university years when I launched my first venture, a fashion house, at the age of 19. This experience confirmed my entrepreneurial spirit and willingness to take risks.

My parents played a crucial role in

inspiring me to pursue this path, providing unwavering support and guidance. Under his mentorship, I developed a strong foundation in business principles and leadership skills. Since then, I have continued to hone my skills through various educational opportunities and practical experiences, driven by a commitment to excellence and a desire to make a meaningful impact.

You've had an impressive career progression at Omorfia Group, from General Manager at Tips & Toes to Chief Operations Officer. What were some of the key milestones or turning points in your career at Omorfia Group?

Some key milestones in my career at Omorfia Group include:

1. **Leading the Largest Chain in the UAE:**

As General Manager at Tips & Toes,

I contributed to making it the largest beauty chain in the UAE, setting industry benchmarks in service and customer satisfaction.

2. **COVID-19 Response:**

During the pandemic, I implemented strict health and safety measures and introduced innovative service models, such as at-home beauty services. Remarkably, we managed to navigate the crisis without laying off a single staff member, ensuring both business continuity and job security.

3. **Managing a Major Merger:**

I successfully oversaw the merger of Bedashing and Tips & Toes, two companies with distinct cultures. Through effective change management strategies, I ensured a smooth integration, fostering a cohesive and collaborative environment.

4. **Acquiring and Integrating Juice Beauty:**

As Chief Operations Officer, I led the acquisition of Juice Beauty. I focused on

I started my career early on in Fashion, then moved to Dubai in 2011 to complete my MBA. One day a friend of mine asked me to conduct market research for their distribution company CND, and I haven't looked back since. I quickly fell in love with the beauty industry and the endless possibilities to be innovative within it.

streamlining operations and maintaining high staff satisfaction levels during the transition, ensuring seamless integration into our existing portfolio.

These milestones reflect my commitment to operational excellence, employee well-being, and strategic growth, all of which have been instrumental in my career progression at Omorfia Group.

Can you share some of the major challenges you faced when you first took on the role of Chief Operations Officer at Omorfia Group and how you overcame them?

One of the most challenging aspects of this role was maintaining consistency across all our locations while preserving the unique essence of each brand. We tackled this by investing heavily in continuous learning and development. Our training programs were designed to instill the highest standard of service in every staff member and encourage constant innovation personally and professionally. We are also dedicated to staying ahead of industry trends through research and development to maintain our competitive edge in the market.



You are known for your entrepreneurial spirit and vision. How do you foster innovation and entrepreneurship within your teams at Omorfia Group?

Innovation is at the heart of everything we do. I lead by example and try to encourage my team to think creatively and embrace new ideas. We prioritize a holistic approach to beauty- being trendsetters and constantly enhancing the customer experience. By fostering an environment where the staff feels empowered to contribute, we cultivate a culture of continuous improvement and entrepreneurial spirit.

Strategic planning is one of your key skills. How do you approach strategic planning to ensure the continued growth and success of Omorfia Group?

My process involves a panoramic approach that includes market research, customer feedback analysis, and trend assessment. We align our business goals with market needs and continuously adapt to changing dynamics within the industry. We also prioritize sustainability and technological advancements to ensure our growth is forward-thinking and responsible.

As a participant in the WE Convention, you've engaged with top-level corporate leaders on

women's empowerment. What are your thoughts on the current state of women's leadership globally, and what steps do you think are necessary to advance it further?

Progress and the milestones achieved are encouraging and hopeful, but I believe there is still much work to be done. There is a gap that still exists in women's empowerment through education, mentorship, and leadership opportunities. We need to create more supportive environments where women can thrive and lead. We need to continue promoting gender equality and addressing systemic barriers to create a more inclusive and healthy business landscape.

Looking back on your career, what do you think are the key lessons you've learned that have shaped your approach to business and leadership?

I am so grateful to have learned so much over the years through my experience and growth. The most important lessons I've learned are the importance of adaptability, the power of continuous learning, and the value of genuine empathy in leadership. These pillars have not only shaped my approach both professionally and personally but also driven our company's ability to innovate and maintain its position in the market.

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE DIGITAL WORLDS: AN INTERVIEW WITH AQUACITY FOUNDER VC LOW

Written by Alexis Miller

VC Low, Founder of Aquacity, a groundbreaking metaverse project dedicated to ocean conservation, also holds key leadership roles at COD, Defination, Sky City, and Vinz Tech. In this compelling interview, he delves into his journey from early life to becoming a leader in Web 3.0.

VC discusses the inspiration behind Aquacity, career challenges, and the innovative projects within its ecosystem while offering his vision for the future of blockchain and leadership insights.

How did your early life and education shape your career path?

I was raised in a household that valued discipline and support in equal measure. Financial constraints meant working through my teen years to fund my education, an experience that forged my work ethic and resolve. My passion for accounting and business management in high school guided me toward a business management diploma and a degree from a local university. There, I encountered a mentor who played a crucial role in shaping my career. He offered me my first position at his business and technical analysis firm, laying the groundwork for my future success. This opportunity provided the springboard from which I launched my own thriving enterprise.

Our focus remains on enhancing our platform and creating new avenues for user engagement and growth within the Aquacity ecosystem.

What inspired you to venture into Web 3.0, and how did your journey begin?

My foray into Web 3.0 began with Vinz Tech, a company I founded to deliver IT support and solutions. The potential of decentralized technology, particularly in finance, initially captured my attention. But the moment that truly sparked my interest was when I started exploring how blockchain could create entirely new worlds—literally.

The concept of a metaverse—a decentralized space where people could interact, create, and build, was both fascinating and challenging to me. This represented more than technological advancement; it presented an opportunity to reimagine digital existence and human interaction in the modern era.

What are some of the challenges you faced in your early career, and how did they shape your approach to leadership?

A significant hurdle I encountered was the early integration of crypto tokens into our business model. The market's unfamiliarity with cryptocurrencies at the time posed considerable adoption challenges. This experience showed me the criticality of timing and market education. It also reinforced the need for a clear vision and the persistence to see it through, which I apply to my leadership style today.

In guiding my team, I balance firm direction with steadfast support. I provide the necessary structure for success while fostering an environment that encourages innovation and personal growth. I believe this approach cultivates both individual and collective excellence.

What was the inspiration behind the creation of the Aquacity Metaverse?

The inspiration for Aquacity came during a trip to Australia with some friends. We noticed the deteriorating state of the beach and felt a deep sense of responsibility to raise awareness about the ocean's declining health. This experience sparked the idea for an aquatic-themed metaverse project that would not only promote ocean conservation but also provide users with a fully immersive metaverse experience where they could live out a second life.

From the beginning, I envisioned Aquacity as a platform where users could engage with concepts of sustainability, collaborate on eco-friendly initiatives, and explore the possibilities of blockchain in creating a more responsible digital future. It's about building a community that cares about both our virtual and real worlds.

What were some of your biggest challenges when setting up Aquacity, and how did you navigate these obstacles?

Despite my crypto background, Aquacity's launch presented distinct challenges.

A primary obstacle was pivoting from conventional crypto projects to a sustainability-focused metaverse. Persuading stakeholders of a sustainable metaverse's viability and profitability proved demanding, particularly in an industry often prioritizing short-term gains.

Another challenge was ensuring that the integration of blockchain technology was seamless and user-friendly, which required balancing innovation with accessibility. Navigating these obstacles meant leveraging my past experiences, staying committed to the vision, and bringing together a team that was not only technically skilled but also shared a passion for sustainability. We approached each challenge methodically, learning and adapting as we grew.

Aquacity has some interesting projects like Dive 2 Earn and AquaGPT. Can you elaborate on these?

Dive 2 Earn (D2E) is Aquacity's pioneering project transforming everyday activities into rewarding experiences. Users can accumulate tokens by engaging in routine tasks such as driving or running, effectively merging the physical and digital worlds.



AQUA is our main governing token, backed by the SOLANA chain, and plays a crucial role in the Aquacity ecosystem. We initially planned for Aquacity to be the governing token, but the opportunities presented by SOLANA led us to make the switch.

AquaGPT, our advanced trading assistant, utilizes sophisticated algorithms to analyze market trends and generate trading strategies. This tool aims to enhance our users' trading performance by providing data-driven insights and recommendations, potentially leading to improved success rates in trading activities within our ecosystem.

Looking ahead, what is your vision for the future of Aquacity and the broader blockchain industry?

My vision for Aquacity is to be a central bridge within the metaverse scene, connecting various metaverse projects and providing users with a seamless, immersive experience. As for the broader blockchain industry, I see it as an ever-growing field with limitless potential that has yet to be fully realized. The field remains ripe for exploration and innovation, a journey I'm thrilled to be part of.

We're also currently developing several exciting initiatives, including Skycity, an expansion of the Aquacity Metaverse. Our focus remains on enhancing our platform and creating new avenues for user engagement and growth within the Aquacity ecosystem.



THROUGH THE CANOPY: HARNESSING MENTORSHIP TO SEE THE FULL SCOPE

Written by contributing writer David Roche



About the Author:

David Roche is a professional coach and mentor at Grey Area Coaching, and works with first-time CEOs across many sectors. David is Chair of London Book Fair and the writing agency New Writing North. He also works as a consultant with startups entering the book industry and lectures at NFTS. His first book, *Just Where You Left It*, was published by Unbound in 2017. David was previously CEO of Borders & Books, Product Director of both Waterstones and HMV, and Group Sales and Marketing Director of HarperCollins Publishing.

Passionately empowering the first-time CEO in his new book *Become a Successful First-Time CEO*, David has distilled decades of hands-on business leadership and coaching expertise into an accessible and strategic guide for those looking to thrive in the C-Suite.

Navigating challenges as a leader is never easy, but this is only further intensified if you are trying to push ahead with little or no support. This blinkered idea of leadership can quickly prevent you from seeing the wood through the trees.

If you were to see a colleague or friend in a similar position to which you are facing, the chances are that you would be able to give them good advice as to what their best course of action should be. However, when it's about you and your situation, people can find it incredibly difficult to see what the best route is.

When those above and below you are looking to you for answers on how to push forward, how do you see the bigger picture? In this article I explain how a professional coach/mentor can help CEOs to start to see the wood among the trees.

Independent coaches and mentors are invaluable to creating breakthroughs. A coach will ask you the right questions to allow you to unlock yourself from the situation that is binding you and impairing your decision-making. A mentor may help you with advice from their greater experience as to what is likely to work best under the circumstances – but they may be

wrong. Coaches may frown on the deviation from the 'questions only' approach, but they may lack the relevant experience to adopt mentoring. Even if you have the experience, getting this balance right is a complex skill, but invaluable when done well. A talented and experienced coach/mentor not only helps the individual they are supporting to find their own best route, but can provide practical advice at the same time.

Independence is critical, especially when the problem at this point for the new CEO boils down to this: It is all about me! The fact that the CEO is thinking, 'I am the problem,' means that they can't share any



of this with anyone else at work. They are in the FOBFO stage. Daunted by the 'Fear Of Being Found Out', their doubts say, 'I'm not sure that I'm good enough to do this job and it's only a matter of time before everyone else finds out.' A coach can help break through this mental block and remind you how you earned your stripes.

When you are seemingly on your own, in the middle of the stress, pressure and loneliness that being at the top can bring, it is nigh on impossible to see a way to leap into a world of excellent relationships and high performance.

Nobody tells you what being a CEO

really entails: the fact it will take over and dominate your life morning, noon and night; that your family may have to take a bit of a back seat as it consumes your waking hours, and that this requires an understanding and agreement with those outside of work in order to keep your home life intact and free you to concentrate on work. You may lose control over areas of expertise that you used to run, only to take on additional areas with which you are unfamiliar. You are only human.

The weight of all of these aspects can quickly impact your ability to lead and prevent you from being able to move

forward. By working with a coach/mentor, they can ease these feelings of loneliness and help you to focus on which strategic relationships you should be investing in first.

The benefits of CEOs of working with a professional coach/mentor are many-fold, particularly for first-time CEOs or those new to their organisation. If you are struggling to see the bigger picture, coaches and mentors can create breakthroughs by asking the right questions, offering an independent sounding board and vital support in what can often feel like a lonely role. Even when you reach the top of your game, never neglect the importance of a coach.



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