

# GLOBAL LEADERS EMBRACE DIFFERENCE





BY SANDRA L. SHULLMAN AND LILY KELLY-RADFORD

To be a true global leader, executives must learn to welcome differences with curiosity and empathy in a way that seeks mutual benefit and growth.

Imagine the following scenario. In a training room of executive learners from a multinational petrochemical corporation, there are at least 20 different nationalities present. Like most such gatherings, learners initially sat with their own: Brits, Malays, Chinese, Nigerians, Indians, Saudis, French and Russians all sitting as remote from each other as their nations appear on a globe. “Go find the person most different from yourself and start a conversation.”

Everyone froze. Not surprisingly, no one is initially comfortable enough to do it. Perhaps because people are conditioned by society to believe that difference is at least cause for hesitation. Being different is often assumed to mean “less than.”

After some prodding, the room began to look more heterogeneous.

In the end, this kind of exercise can illustrate a valuable lesson: To be global as an individual and as an organization requires that executives embrace diverse learning at the personal/interpersonal level and at the business level. This includes learning to embrace differences with personal curiosity and empathy.

This is the fundamental step in making an organization global, but most companies aren’t willing. A 2013 Right Management study reported that 42 percent of individuals in overseas assignments fail. The same study found 22 percent of North American companies don’t provide learning preparation for executives being sent abroad.



#### ON THE WEB

What skills do today’s executives need to develop to become effective global leaders of tomorrow? Join the *Chief Learning Officer* LinkedIn group to discuss. [tinyurl.com/globalCLO](http://tinyurl.com/globalCLO)

# Marriott Elevates Its Global General Managers

By Kate Everson

When it comes to Marriott International Inc.'s general management training, employees have checked in for an extended stay.

"We don't want it to be a fire hose experience where in a week you'll get 15 topics," said Tim Tobin, vice president of global learning and leadership development.

The hotel chain's Elevate program gives employees a year of training in owner relations, sales and revenue management, brand, customer focus, intercultural communications, human resources, finance and crisis communication — all pivotal parts of being general managers.

These skills are delivered through a variety of methods, including classroom, individual development planning, mentorships and webinars. Toward the end of the program, participants complete a two-week shadow period and participate in peer forums made up of their fellow trainees.

"All of leadership development has got to have a component that's not just developing skills, but also creating deep roots in terms of what are your values, what is your purpose in life and what assumptions do you make about your role as a leader and the impact you have on the lives around you," said Kathleen Ross, executive vice president of leadership development at consulting firm Healthy Companies International. "Otherwise it's hollow and unauthentic."

In the next several years, Marriott wants to expand its presence in Asia by 30 percent and in the Middle East by 50 percent. To get there, it has to add at least 300 general managers. Tobin said Elevate has prepared 400 potential general managers worldwide to fill those spots.

Elevate pulls employees focused on particular functional areas and exposes them to the rest of the job before they're promoted. This approach shrank speed-to-performance rates from 10 to 12 months to two to four weeks.

Elevate creates cohorts of 30 to 40 people from more than 55 countries and territories. This deepens the talent pool from which international properties can find general managers with the right skills and cultural background.

General managers are Marriott's front-line leaders who work with customers, communities, financials and other employees, Tobin said. In a global setting like Marriott's, understanding cultural context is pivotal to communicate with all levels of internal and external partners.

But knowing how to successfully work with these groups takes more than having the right answers.

"Sometimes you get more seduced into having the answers rather than connecting with people," Ross said. "We're not looking for answers, but for human connection and assurance. That's whether you're a front-line supervisor or a CEO."

*Kate Everson is a Chief Learning Officer associate editor. To comment, email editor@CLOmedia.com.*

## Don't Miss Global Opportunities

Expatriate, international businessperson and global executive: These three terms are often used interchangeably, but each have distinct roles and the latter is all encompassing.

Most global executives are expatriates, which means they generally stay in one place abroad but aren't necessarily tasked with leadership roles. International executives have leadership roles and are aware of global differences but don't necessarily need to engage with local personnel.

Truly global executives, however, must lead in these situations and be comfortable moving fluidly through different time zones, cultures and geopolitical boundaries. In other words, the distinctive characteristic for global leaders is their ease of engagement and re-engagement — the ability to engage in meaningful, effective and productive ways in any locale.

English-speaking Western executives often have an advantage because English is the dominant global language for business. But this also can become a weakness. Executives may assume that a common language means a common culture and common context, but it's actually the most common obstacle to engagement.

Western executives have extra responsibility in global engagement because they come with a different lens than some other countries. English-speaking countries that once imperially ruled today's emerging nations have more responsibility to understand and acknowledge this historical and social context. Understanding the privilege of having English as a first language in a multinational world is one of the bigger adjustments for multinational executives.

Western businesses can no longer expect the world to come to them. Since the financial crisis of 2008, when legacy markets in the world's wealthiest nations reeled, the world saw growth not only in Brazil, Russia, India, China and South India, but also in many emerging nations. Linda Rottenberg, co-founder and CEO of nonprofit company Endeavor, which advances high-impact entrepreneurship around the world, coined the term "E2E" for "emerging market to emerging market" in 2011.

"When I came up with that, my point was that so many Americans that I spoke to — especially in Silicon Valley — assumed they were like Florence in the age of the Renaissance," she said. "There was a sense that anyone who wanted to grow big had to come to the United States, the hotbed of action."

"What I started seeing were companies in Brazil going to Turkey and the Middle East, and companies in Asia finding Latin America and realizing they could almost bypass the so-called developed world because they had enough markets and growth opportunities among themselves."

Organizations may survive without being global, but without adjustment, nonglobal Western organizations will miss out on their own potential growth.

## Engagement Is the Global Edge

Global executives have to engage. They must be able to deal with local personnel and their cultural contexts.

Diane Johnson, director of talent at Kennametal Inc., a global tooling, mining and highway construction company with customers in more than 60 nations, said trust is primary to successful global engagement.

"Most cultural appreciation requires the time to build a relationship and to build trust," she said. "That's really the engagement part. That's the investment on the front end that is necessary for the engagement connection."

Executives must connect to the people under their direction, even if they need to travel to communicate face to face with their direct reports.

"The glue that helps engagement happen is the trusting relationship that holds things together when things seem to be falling apart," Johnson said.

“You are more willing to walk through fire for the person you trust.”

However, traditional expatriate training doesn't go far enough for most Western executives to be effective abroad. Competencies needed for global engagement focus heavily on interpersonal skills; global executives need more.

## A Willingness to Learn

In their 2002 foundational study of global leadership titled “Developing Global Executives,” Morgan McCall Jr. and George Hollenbeck established a list of learnable behaviors:

- Open-minded and flexible in thought and tactics
- Cultural interest and sensitivity
- Able to deal with complexity
- Resilient, resourceful, optimistic and energetic
- Honesty and integrity
- Stable personal life
- Value-added technical or business skills

In 2014, writing for Forbes.com, Jack Zenger, CEO of the leadership development firm Zenger Folkman, offered six skills for global leaders: strategic perspective, customer focus and understanding, ability to spot trends, engaged and committed teams, willingness to take risks, and deep knowledge and expertise.

The commonality between these skills and behaviors is emotional intelligence, and they all can be developed through assessment, learning and coaching. But they are too often mistakenly taken for granted.

In her book, “Crazy Is a Compliment,” Endeavor's Rottenberg also stresses authenticity as a key tenet. “People can see right through inauthenticity. People who try to change themselves based on what they think different cultures want are doomed to fail. You can be culturally sensitive and still be true to who you are.”

For meaningful engagement to occur, executives must not only be authentic but also they must be adept when adjusting to local culture while still employing leadership skills. Learning to admit one is still learning is surprisingly difficult for many executives, but it's vital to being stylistically engaging, especially with local personnel.

With this in mind, willingness to learn about local religion, educational systems and governmental systems will pay huge dividends in working effectively with local co-workers and subordinates. Individuals should consistently place themselves in unfamiliar situations to expose weaknesses that need to be developed. Or consider identifying a local coach to help navigate company and gov-

**GLOBAL** continued on page 48



# When you're ready to invest in your organization's future.

You are ready for American Public University.

American Public University is ready to help your team succeed. Your employees can manage their personal and professional lives while pursuing a respected degree online — at a cost that's 20% less than the average published in-state rates at public universities.\*

Visit [StudyatAPU.com/CLO](http://StudyatAPU.com/CLO)

\*College Board: Trends in College Pricing, 2013

We want you to make an informed decision about the university that's right for you. For more about our graduation rates, the median debt of students who completed each program, and other important information, visit [www.apu.edu/disclosure](http://www.apu.edu/disclosure).

**BEST ONLINE PROGRAMS**  
**USNews**  
**BACHELOR'S**

**APU** American Public University  
Ready when you are.™

**GLOBAL** continued from page 29

ernment relationships in a new region.

“A successful global leader has learning agility beyond the job,” Johnson said. “If they listen well, they do better. Listening implies you don’t know everything, and you are trying to listen to see what the specific needs of a particular region are.”

## What Companies Are Missing

Companies need to help people practice learning agility and gain tacit knowledge, so they can understand and improve their ability to respond to situations that are new to them.

While executives are expected to be experts, they simultaneously must learn about local cultures. The first step is for them to understand their own learning style.

There are many ways to do this, but one approach, described by Maxine Dalton, author of “Learning Tactics Inventory,” is for a leader to ask if he learns best by: going to a book and seeking information, seeking advice from people to understand their approaches, or by jumping in and experimenting.

The best mode is to use all three. Working globally, executives should always be learning different things. But in too many cases, the “leader as learner” role doesn’t appear soon enough. Executives need to become broad learners earlier so they practice learning skills regularly.

The unfortunate reality is that, after an overseas assignment, little learning takes place. Executives come back to the home office and report that no one asks them about their experiences. Regular debriefs could uncover insight and lessons learned that greatly enhance the global effectiveness of the entire enterprise.

The goal is to gain the ability to approach things differently. In their book “What Is Global Leadership,” Ernest Gundling, Terry Hogan and Karen Cvitkovich advise leaders to seek out critical differences and “invite the unexpected.”

Being global is a competitive advantage for individuals and organizations as so much international business relies on engagement with emerging economies. Corporate learning must evolve to become globally oriented. In doing so, Western businesses and leaders will benefit from honing these teachable learning skills at a time when few companies have focused on it.

Recall the petrochemical company’s “introduce yourself to the most different person” icebreaker. The exercise would likely play out quite differently with a group of seasoned global leaders. Instead of avoiding or denying differences, the group would be eager to identify and learn from those who could help them the most: those most unlike themselves. **CLO**

*Sandra L. Shullman and Lily Kelly-Radford are psychologists and partners in The Executive Development Group. To comment, email [editor@CLOmedia.com](mailto:editor@CLOmedia.com).*

**BRAIN** continued from page 33

ing bursts held people’s attention. There was generation through immediate, one-page practice tools that people used straight after the video to try new techniques. There were strong emotions, driven by a focused, intensive ‘sprint’ type roll out, with thousands of managers experiencing similar content at the same time. And the learning was spaced out over 30 days.

## Teach Leaders About the Brain

As well as neuroscience informing us how to design better learning experiences, it is also helping us improve the quality of content inside those experiences. Cynical, data-driven managers often have strong technical capabilities but lack soft skills. If we want to improve those skills, it is helpful to speak in a language these managers are comfortable with. Neuroscience provides an evidence-based approach to explain soft issues like the value of trust in leadership.

In the Time Warner Cable program, the concepts introduced to managers included the science and practice of minimizing threats — or stress responses in the brain — in the employee’s mind when having a tough conversation. Strong stress responses inhibit quality thinking, reducing prefrontal function, thus inhibiting perception, cognition, creativity and collaboration.

The company also took advantage of a second area of neuroscience research that has evolved around generating insight, which is the sudden formation of wide scale new connections across the brain. Insight is one way to change people because it literally changes the brain.

A third area of research Time Warner Cable used involves activating a growth mindset. This involves holding the belief that people can grow and develop, rather than assuming or acting as though people’s abilities are innate and can’t improve. Activating this belief in people can alter how they perceive feedback, changes their willingness to set stretch goals, and increase performance.

The research behind these three ideas created a strong pull for the company’s managers to participate in the program, and these fundamental concepts gave them new ideas on how to improve their effectiveness.

Neuroscience is here to stay, and it’s now possible to leverage related findings to improve organizational learning and performance, both at the process level and via content development. This affects what we teach leaders and how we teach them, and it’s opening up new frontiers for breakthroughs in leadership effectiveness. **CLO**

*David Rock is the co-founder and director of the NeuroLeadership Institute, a global research and behavior-change consulting firm, and author of “Your Brain at Work.” He can be reached at [editor@CLOmedia.com](mailto:editor@CLOmedia.com).*